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ISSUE 113 | OCTOBER 2022

cruise

TRADE NEWS



CHARGED AND READY

How Havila Voyages is leading
the way to cleaner cruising

In association with



INTERVIEW

In conversation with
P&O Cruises' Ruth Venn

TECH TALK

The benefits of embracing
new technology

CTN INVESTIGATES

The future of travel
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Cover image: Havila Voyages

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Editor's Letter

WELCOME TO THE OCTOBER ISSUE

Momentum is a powerful thing. It drives innovation, forward-thinking and public perception. For cruise, its momentum has steadily built this year, with new ship launches, fresh orders and destinations opening up.

Such a situation is of course welcome news all round, but it does pose the question of – with so much going on – how can cruise lines keep agents in the loop and prepared for what is to come? This leads us to the investigation in this issue, as we analyse the current state of travel agent training and debate how it will evolve.

Speaking of new ships, we take a deep dive into the on-board areas on Norwegian Cruise Line's *Norwegian Prima*, the first in a new class for the line, which was christened in late August in the Icelandic capital Reykjavik.

Our main interview this time is with P&O Cruises director of sales Ruth Venn, as the line prepares for the launch of *Arvia* in December, and we also look at the story of Travel 1st and its growth since launching during the height of the pandemic.

New for this issue is a column dedicated to all things travel technology, with expert opinion from Traveltek. As the company's chief commercial officer Cressida Sergeant explains,



Above: Sailing on Oceania Cruises' delightful *Marina*

"technology is the most unsexy part of the industry", nevertheless its importance is growing, and now is the time to get on board.

Inside, you'll also find the full shortlist for the Wave Awards 2022, as we approach the awards ceremony on 16 November, as well as the latest thoughts from Princess Cruises vice-president UK and Europe Eithne Williamson.

Happy reading.

Gary Peters

Editor, Cruise Trade News

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Cruise Trade News

The Briefing

THE ULTIMATE DESTINATION FOR CRUISE NEWS

IN BRIEF

World Europa naming

● MSC Cruises' new flagship *MSC World Europa* will be officially named in Doha, Qatar. The capital city will host the ceremony on 13 November, demonstrating MSC's "overall commitment to Qatar and the continued importance of the Middle East", the line said in a statement.

Luminosa joins Carnival

● Carnival Cruise Line has added *Carnival Luminosa* to its fleet. The ship has transitioned from sister line Costa Cruises and will begin sailing for its new line from 6 November, departing Brisbane, Australia.

APPOINTMENTS



● Princess Cruises has appointed **Nick Hughes** as sales director for UK and Europe, effective from 17 October. Hughes – most recently sales director, tour operations for dnata B2B – replaces Rachel Poultney, who has joined PR42.



● Silversea Cruises has announced the appointment of **Roberto Verdino** as senior vice-president of revenue management. Verdino – who will be based in Monaco – will oversee revenue operations, forecasting and commercial planning.

INNOVATION

CTN launches Knowledge Hub

Cruise Trade News is delighted to reveal its latest innovation, designed to support travel agents.

The digital Knowledge Hub, which is now live on the *CTN* website and free to use, is the new one-stop-shop for agents, featuring key information about ocean and river cruise destinations, as well as a comprehensive bank of information about every ocean and river cruise line.

For example, in the destination sections, agents can access selling tips, sample excursions to suggest to clients, ideas for pre and post options and much more. The new sections dedicated to all ocean and river cruise lines include every possible detail imaginable, such as what they offer to the trade, as well



as in-depth information for every ship in their fleets.

CTN editor Gary Peters said: "The Knowledge Hub is a valuable addition to the *CTN* website, representing the next stage in our growth strategy, which so far this year has seen the launch of a new website, digital magazines, and a focus on hard-hitting, investigative journalism."

INDUSTRY

NCL CEO: UK-based Prima ship & sustainability plans

Norwegian Cruise Line president and CEO Harry Sommer has stated that the line is "committed" to having a Prima-class ship based in Southampton and confirmed that it was looking at ways in which to use alternative fuel sources.

Sommer said the UK is "a very good market for us". He added: "Next summer *Norwegian Prima* will be



based in Southampton. We are committed to having a Prima-based ship in Southampton ongoing." Sommer said that ships

three and four will not use liquefied natural gas (LNG), as they "are too far along in development".

He also said that NCL was investigating alternative solutions such as hydrogen. "We are actively testing what we can do for ships five and six. Ultimately the real solution is finding an environmentally friendly sustainable fuel."

THE NEWS YOU NEED

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Robotron combines the thrill of a rollercoaster with a personalised DJ music experience

OCEAN

MSC reveals Seascape experiences

MSC Cruises has revealed the “technologically advanced” on-board entertainment options that will appear on *MSC Seascape*.

When it launches in December, *MSC Seascape* will feature Robotron, described as a “thrilling amusement ride that offers the breathtaking thrill of a rollercoaster at sea combined with a personalised DJ music experience”.

Robotron is a robotic arm, seating three guests, flying them 53 metres above the sea. Riders will have a 360-degree view of the horizon as they hang over the

edge of the deck. Guests will be able to personalise their experience and “curate their musical journey”.

MSC Seascape will also have a virtual reality flight simulator, virtual reality motorbikes and racing simulation game *MSC Formula Racer*.

MSC Cruises SVP onboard revenues Brandon Briggs said: “Robotron, the first-ever robotic amusement ride to appear on a cruise ship, will create a new standard of fun with an immersive, customised ride experience, unique to each rider.”

SHIPS

New wind-powered ships set to launch

French company TransOceanic Wind Transport, founded in 2011, has ordered two wind-powered ships fitted with fully mechanised and automated sails to be delivered in late 2023 and spring 2024, reports Dave Monk.

Passengers will be able to enjoy the ultimate silent escape on the two cargo vessels, which will use wind propulsion around 90 per cent of the time.

As well as delivering goods in an environmental way, the ships will be able to carry up to 12 passengers each from Le Havre, including a 13-day crossing to New York, two-week sailing to the Ivory Coast or a 55-day journey to Shanghai. The ships will also offer a lounge with



TransOceanic Wind Transport's new wind-powered ships

music, films and a maritime library, plus a sun deck at the back.

Company president Guillaume Le Grand said: “We have had a very strong demand for our sailings, which will be ‘passages’ more than cruises. We think the level of environmental interest is going up rapidly, as well as the search for authenticity.”

Read Dave Monk’s investigation into the use of wind power in November’s edition of *Cruise Trade News*.

MARKETING GURU



Accord Marketing chief client officer **Maria Payne** discusses who the luxury traveller is

To begin with, let’s challenge the perception that the luxury traveller is confined to a mature and affluent demographic. According to research by Mintel for their 2021 *Luxury Travel* report, 64 per cent of travellers who plan to take a high-end holiday in the next three years are aged 16-54, while 63 per cent of them are C1C2DE.

Overlooking the nuances of this audience means failing to reach all potential customers, so it’s important to broaden your horizons and create a marketing strategy that reaches all of this audience.

Moreover, understanding specific motivators is vital for planning your marketing comms moving forward. Tapping into that emotional desire rather than a sales-focused need is key for luxury travel marketing.

After all, luxury travel is bigger than the destinations visited or the cabin size. It provides a feeling of exclusivity, a unique opportunity to mentally switch off.

The power of luxury lies in its exclusivity, which translates as not being seen everywhere. Luxury brands do not strive to please everyone all of the time, so visibility is highly selective, with messages that entice their target audience to be part of an exclusive community.

To elevate themselves above mid-market brands, communications must focus on heritage, extraordinary experiences and customer service.

For further marketing strategy information, contact me at maria.payne@accordmarketing.com



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DENMARK
1 AUGUST 2023

DISSEMBARKATION
COPENHAGEN,
DENMARK
15 AUGUST 2023



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Ocean Penthouse fares from GBP 8,750 pp
Ocean Residence fares from GBP 12,650 pp

Scottish Highlands & Icelandic Geysers

EMBARKATION
GLASGOW (GREENOCK),
SCOTLAND
2 SEPTEMBER 2023

DISSEMBARKATION
REYKJAVIK,
ICELAND
9 SEPTEMBER 2023



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CHANGING SEASONS

The elusive Aurora Borealis begin to make an appearance from November in northerly locations

With the summer now over, Fred Olsen Cruise Lines head of sales **Geoff Ridgeon** looks ahead to what's on the horizon for late 2022 sailings

Somehow, it seems like only yesterday I was reaching for the factor 50 and now I'm having the daily turmoil over whether I need a light jacket, a coat, an umbrella, a sun hat or all of the above when I leave the house.

While we ponder on the change of seasons, I thought it might be a good time to talk about Christmas. There, I've said it – the word most of us want to avoid until it's time to actually put the tree up. But the reality is, now really is a great time to be promoting the festive season.

In general, it was a great summer. As an industry, we benefitted from demand from

“Destinations like the Canary Islands, Spain and Portugal are all within reach in December”

summer holidays not taken in recent years as customer confidence crept up much closer to pre-pandemic levels (and in many cases exceeding it, too). At last, travel is starting to feel normal again. Plus, we had some solid months of sunshine and warmer temperatures here at home.

Cooler adventures

No sooner are we grumbling about the heat than we're grumbling that it's gone again. Now we are starting to see the nights draw in and the temperature is dropping. And what that brings with it is a yearning to get that next adventure booked, to have something in the diary to look forward to.

For many that will be winter sun, and there'll be plenty of chances for your customers to venture to warmer climates over the cooler months. At Fred. Olsen, we continue to offer regional departures, with destinations including the Canary Islands, Spain and Portugal all within reach in December. Other lines will be operating fly-cruise programmes, and there will be some longer duration sailings on offer.

For many, the winter is the perfect time to venture to a cooler climate, and adventures into the Arctic could be a great choice. From November, the

elusive Aurora Borealis begin to make an appearance in northerly locations, and we have some great options to seek them out on sailings heading to Norway.

Of course, nothing says Christmas quite like enjoying a nice glass of Glühwein at a festive European market, so a Christmas market cruise could be just the ticket. We are certainly seeing our Christmas market cruises prove popular, with one option departing from Liverpool in November calling into Amsterdam, Hamburg and Honfleur. 🍷



GEOFF RIDGEON

HEAD OF SALES
FRED OLSEN CRUISE LINES

As autumn brings a drop in temperature, many yearn for a warm getaway

Sales *Inspiration*

INCENTIVES • ITINERARIES • SPECIAL OFFERS

Havila Voyages launches Northern Lights promise

Havila Voyages has unveiled a Northern Lights promise, meaning that guests who book a 12-day cruise along the Norwegian coast will be eligible for a free six or seven-night voyage if the natural phenomenon doesn't appear during their trip.

The initiative is valid for all departures from 1 October to 31 March, and the replacement itinerary, if needed, will take place the following winter.

Head of sales UK Matthew Valentine said: "The introduction of a Northern Lights Promise clearly demonstrates how strongly we believe that our brand new ships are the best place from which to see the Northern Lights.

"Those seeking out the Aurora Borealis... can watch the skies from our on-board jacuzzi or head to the lounge."



Havila Voyages guests who miss out on a Northern Lights display are guaranteed a free return visit

VISIT

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FOR THE LATEST
INCENTIVES & TRAVEL
AGENT TRAINING
MATERIALS

Win with Celebrity auctions

Celebrity Cruises has updated its Celebrity Rewards offering with the launch of Celebrity Rewards Auctions.

The monthly auction offers agents the opportunity to put their points towards prizes, including personal cruise holidays and Celebrity-branded items.

Celebrity Cruises UK & Ireland director of sales Claire Stirrup said: "Our travel partners are crucial to Celebrity's success and, with this in mind, we really wanted

to provide even more ways for them to use their Celebrity Rewards points.

"Having the opportunity to join Celebrity Cruises on their own holiday or arrange for the perfect gift for their clients really does take this scheme to the next level. We hope this continues to show our appreciation for our valued trade partners."

Travel agents should visit the website celebritycentral.co.uk for more information.



Celebrity prizes include personal cruise holidays and branded items



Royal's Mini Wave campaign

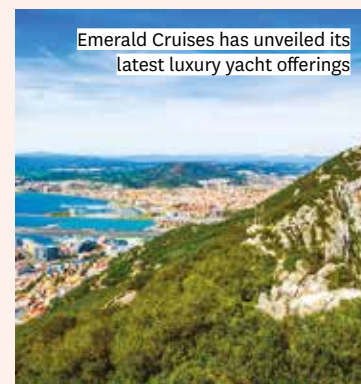
Royal Caribbean International has launched a selection of Mini Wave offers, running until 31 October 2022, for guests that book select 2023 sailings.

Guests travelling from London Gatwick can secure their flights from just £1 when heading to *Symphony of the Seas* in Barcelona or *Odyssey of the Seas* in Rome next summer.

The cruise line is also offering £150 savings on airfares from select UK airports for European sailings departing between 16 April 2023 and

22 October 2023 on *Explorer of the Seas*, *Rhapsody of the Seas*, *Symphony of the Seas* and *Odyssey of the Seas*.

In addition, those who book an Oceanview stateroom on any *Anthem of the Seas* European itineraries sailing from 12 May to 3 October 2023 will be upgraded to a Balcony stateroom, while deposits of £99 are also available. Deluxe drinks packages are also available for £43 per person, per day on seven-night or longer sailings on board *Anthem*, *Odyssey*, *Symphony* or *Wonder of the Seas*.



Emerald's yacht collection released

Emerald Cruises has launched its latest luxury yacht cruise brochure for 2023 and 2024, promising an all-new collection of ocean cruise itineraries.

Guests sailing these new voyages will be able to cruise on board *Emerald Azzurra* and *Emerald Sakara*, which is set to debut in late 2023.

Highlights include the Caribbean & Central American itineraries, transatlantic voyages and new ports of calls across the Mediterranean and Adriatic.

New additions to the 2023/24 programme include *Azzurra* and *Sakara* homeporting in the Caribbean during the winter of both years, sailing to 15 new destinations.



Azamara unveils 2024 Europe programme

Azamara has revealed a series of itineraries for its 2024 Europe deployment.

The line will operate a total of 84 cruises, of which 53 are what Azamara calls Country Intensive voyages, with more than 50 per cent of port calls being a late night or overnight.

In addition, the programme includes maiden ports for the line, such as Taranto, Italy, as well as a return to Hamburg. Azamara will visit Trollfjord, Norway,

and also Edinburgh during the Military Tattoo event. The line has also extended its partnership with PerryGolf, a provider of international golf tours, to offer more golf-themed itineraries in 2024.

Carol Cabezas, Azamara president, said: "With unique new ports and plenty of late stays and overnights, we encourage guests to explore each destination at their own pace and travel off the beaten path."

TECH TALK

In the first of a new exclusive feature, Traveltek chief commercial officer **Cressida Sergeant** explains the benefits of getting on board with new technology

Cruise technology is the most unsexy part of the industry. For suppliers and agents, it's like spending money on guttering. To use the decorating analogy, your marketing is your wallpaper and internal décor. You can, of course, keep spending more on décor and ignore the guttering. However, when the guttering leaks you have a real problem.

When you put your technology on a list of cost and importance, it's maybe near the bottom, but I can assure you when Traveltek suffers an outage (thankfully rarely), I hear from our clients within minutes. Tech is the life blood of any travel business and, if it isn't, it should be.

Cruise line technology has greatly improved in the last few years and there is more to come very soon. Most people I speak to still seem apprehensive learning about technology, but never be afraid to ask questions. We really need to do a better job of educating our industry on the benefits of technology and how it can bring value to many travel agents.

In the tech world we are bad for acronyms and expecting people to understand what they mean, so let's start making this easier for agents. If you are still using spreadsheets and paper documentation, it is time to address this. Investment in simple systems and improving your basic workflows could save you time.

“A robot worker for repetitive tasks doesn't take a holiday, get sick or resign after six months”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Think about your business processes and add technology to enhance your team to achieve efficiency and scale

If you have a tech question, ask it – there is no such thing as a stupid question

Technology doesn't have to be expensive and can be done in modules. Think about your biggest pain point first and start from there

Clever solutions

Some of the things worth considering include thinking about your search and book technology. The benefit of this is having an aggregated search for all cruise lines rather than going into individual systems each time. This search is driven by an API – or application programming interface to you and me – which is essentially a clever way for two or more software systems to talk to each other.

An API allows the cruise line to pass their data through a technology provider and display this on a customer website or booking tool, to display price

and content. A bookable API will also help you transact this booking online. You may want to invest in a CRM (customer relationship management) system, and there are plenty to choose from.

Your CRM choice will depend on a number of things, such as the attributes and benefits you are looking for and of course the budget you have to spend. For agents struggling under the workload of admin, you should investigate RPA (robotic process automation) as a possible solution. RPA uses artificial intelligence, which means you have a robot worker that you train to do repetitive tasks.

This could be matching finance invoices or automating booking documentation. Although this may seem an investment, a robot doesn't take a holiday, get sick or resign after six months. The RPA also allows you to scale up effectively. So, it might be unsexy, but it's worth it. 🤖



CRESSIDA SERGEANT
CHIEF COMMERCIAL OFFICER
TRAVELTEK

It's time for travel to crack the exterior and embrace tech



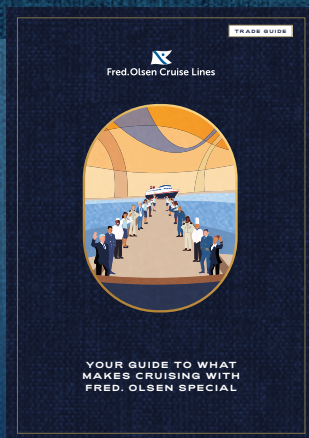
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CHARGED AND READY

Havila Voyages Head of Sales UK
Matthew Valentine explains how the new line intends to introduce more sustainability measures and increase trade relationships

What key selling angles should agents use to convince clients to sail with Havila?

There are a few areas where we believe we excel and offer something different to our competitors. One of the most important areas is the environment and sustainability. Havila sails the most environmentally friendly ships of this size, anywhere in the world.

Our ships can cruise for up to four hours at a time purely on battery power, allowing us to sail through fragile environments such as the Norwegian fjords almost silently and emission free. The batteries can then be charged using clean hydropower. However, it doesn't stop there. We continue to work on making our ships even more environmentally friendly in future and are committed to retaining that focus.

Even guests who are less aware of environmental issues have commented how wonderful it is to sail through the fjords on battery power – the ship is so quiet that nature takes over and all you can hear are the waterfalls and birds. We are also very proud of the food we offer

on board our ships and believe that the culinary experience should be a key highlight of the trip.

The ports along the coastal route each have their own specialities, local recipes and flavours allowing Havila to offer a round-trip in locally sourced, traditional dishes. This means we can offer a more immersive food experience and a unique epicurean voyage of discovery. The recipes are designed to showcase the best ingredients from the sun-kissed mountainsides of the fjords, and some of the world's best fishing waters on one of the most unspoiled coastlines in the world.

Feedback from our guests tells us that they love our new ships, particularly for the spacious cabins and common areas. Even at full capacity there is plenty of room on board, so it never feels crowded.

Earlier this year, you completed the first zero-emission cruise through the Geirangerfjord – how do you intend to build on that?

Our business has been built around a desire to be as sustainable as possible. We are already sailing the most environmentally friendly ships of this size in the world, but we don't plan to stop there. There is so much more to do, and our ultimate goal is to be able to offer the complete 12-day trip emission free.

Havila Voyages has invested more than £41 million in new technology and our ships are ready to go to zero emissions completely from liquefied natural gas (LNG) to biogas. We are working on biogas solutions and are investing in research projects relating to hydrogen. Once that is a viable option for passenger ships, our fleet can easily be adapted. Our ships can also connect to shore power facilities.



Matthew Valentine

HEAD OF SALES UK
HAVILA VOYAGES

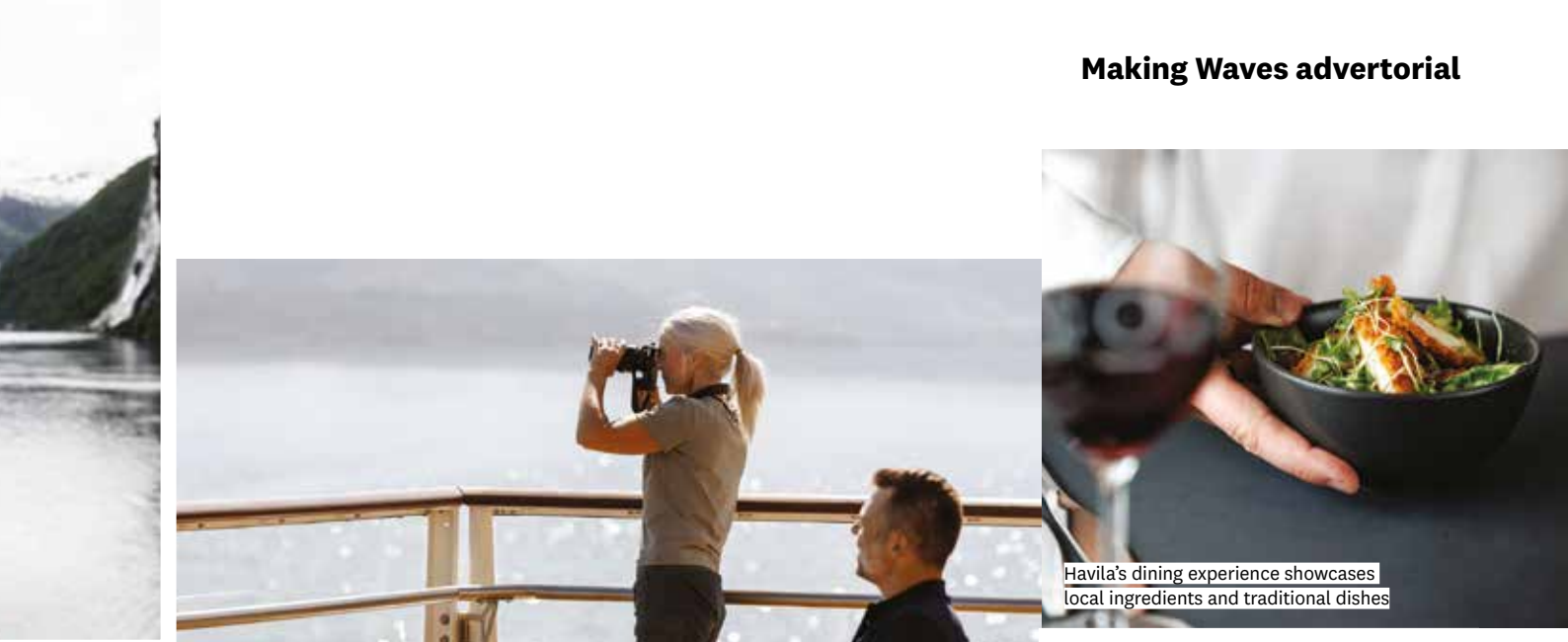


Battery power means ships can sail Norway's fjords in near silence

“Our ships are ready to go to zero emissions completely from liquefied natural gas to biogas”



Havila Castor made the first zero-emission cruise through the Geirangerfjord in June this year



Havila's dining experience showcases local ingredients and traditional dishes

Even at full capacity, spacious common areas give plenty of room to relax

Other lines are ramping up their own environmental plans – how can you learn from others to ensure the industry as a whole becomes more sustainable?

We are excited to have led the way in this field and continue to invest in new technology and research, which ultimately everyone can benefit from, and which will allow us to build a more sustainable industry together. It is essential that the industry continues to push forward and change for the better, but that only comes from continued investment and a razor-sharp focus on what is best for the environment.

Back in November 2020, you told CTN that building trade relationships was vital to your future success – have you built those partnerships, and how do you intend to grow trade support?

Building relationships within the travel trade remains key to our success and we are pleased with how far we have come. It's never easy being the industry newcomer, but we already have partnerships with Best Served Scandinavia, Bluewater Holidays, Titan Holidays and Regent Holidays, plus many others are in the pipeline.

We've also had great conversations with agency chains and are in the process of joining ABTA. We believe being ABTA bonded will open a number of new doors and we hope to build relationships with the consortia in the near future. We are keen to get as many agents as possible on our ships so they can see for themselves what a wonderful product it is.

Havila Capella is back sailing following the issues relating to insurance – are those issues 100 per cent over and put to bed now?

It was frustrating for us not to be able to sail *Capella* for a short period earlier this year. So, we are delighted to have her sailing again and it is very much business as usual as far as our guests and trade partners are concerned.

Of the itineraries you have operated to date, what has been the feedback from guests on board?

I've been so proud of the feedback we have received from our guests. They are loving how spacious the ships are and really enjoying the on-board cuisine. However, it is also pleasing and perhaps surprising how much they value the environmental credentials of the ships and really enjoy the experience of sailing under battery power.

How is work progressing on Havila Polaris and Havila Pollux?

We are excited to introduce *Polaris* and *Pollux* to the fleet later this year. As a start-up, it has been challenging to launch so many ships in the space of a year, but that makes us even prouder to have delivered a high-quality product that continues to go from strength to strength. *Havila Polaris* is due to start operating on 29 December and *Pollux* will join the fleet in March 2023. 📍





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ANNIVERSARY OFFER

Booking dates

Sep 1, 2022 - Oct 31, 2022

Travel dates

Jan 1, 2023 - Dec 31, 2023

Terms & Conditions

*≈435£ per cabin for the Round Voyage or ≈220£ per cabin for Voyage North/South. The onboard credit cannot be paid out in cash or transferred to other voyages and only applies to new bookings made during the campaign period.

**Price example: jan 2023, 2 guests, Interior Cabin.

***Price example: may 2023, 2 guests, Interior Cabin.

TRAINING DAY

Gary Peters and **Lucy Abbott** take an in-depth look at the current state of travel agent training and ask, how might it evolve?



At present, barely a day goes by without news of a new ship launch, orders or fresh itineraries, and such a situation is indeed very welcome for all in the cruise sector. This new product – aside from the confidence it demonstrates in the industry's future – also means that cruise lines are keen to ramp up their agent training and trade teams, to provide the tools needed to effectively sell their holidays.

In recent months, CLIA has updated its trade-facing website cruising.org to boost its support for travel agents. It has added a 'cruise daily' page, which includes the latest news, a review of the previous month's key developments, the latest CLIA updates and content, new training resources and competition winners.

The association has also created a page for cruise brand profiles and trade contacts, which is "intended to

Lines have created specific roles to act as a key link to trade partners

be a one-stop-shop for CLIA cruise operators' brand information, sales contact details and social channels", CLIA said. These additions follow on from the speed-training events it held in July and August, known as 'Cruise Love Bites', which included presentations, virtual ship tours and product updates from ocean, river, luxury, and expedition cruise representatives.

"We are now entering phase two of our learning academy development," says CLIA UK & Ireland MD Andy Harmer. "Modules are being refreshed to add more visual, map-based content and additional interactivity will be introduced to encourage engagement.

"Alongside the more formal online training, we now offer more on demand

options for learners to engage with us. Both virtual training and recordings of virtual training, available in our webinars on demand library, mean content is readily accessible at a time to suit the learner."

Trade support

A similar training focus can be found elsewhere, too. Some lines are adding to their trade teams to boost support, while others have created specific training roles to act as a key link to trade partners.

Scenic, for example, said in June that it had a "promise to engage with every agent keen to learn more about its portfolio of ocean, river and superyacht cruising brands". Recruitment for its 10-strong trade team was recently completed with the appointment of Ryan Readman in a new sales support role, joining a restructured team that has been bolstered this year with the additions of Jonathan Davies (sales manager north), Louise Tansey (sales manager central) Christina Cooper (trade marketing executive) and Jonathan Edwards (trade support).

In August, luxury river line Uniworld announced three appointments to its UK trade sales team in response to "increased demand". Edwina Coppock has joined as key account manager for the south, following 11 years as head of trade sales at Titan Travel, while Lucy Hone, formerly of Uniworld and Scenic, has come out of retirement as sales manager for the south. Margaret McCorriston is also in as sales manager for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Then we have Riviera Travel, which in the last 12 months has taken a conscious decision to fully back the trade. This summer, Martin Page – previously strategic account manager at Classic Package Holidays – joined as a new key account manager, while Ashley Walker has returned to the operator as an office-based agency sales administrator. Other recent



Barrhead offers "an intense period of product immersion" in its new Cruise Academy learning programme



Michelle Tingley, brand training manager at Fred Olsen

“Personal relationships are integral, which is why we have an experienced team of key account managers”

appointments include Jessica Payne as business development executive and Claire Hills as a key account manager.

One of the most headline-grabbing appointments came at Fred Olsen Cruise Lines in February, when Michelle Tingley took up the role of brand training manager, a new position for the cruise line. Tingley, who has been with the line for six years, says: “I’m responsible for training and delivery of information to our agents and their guests. Ultimately, I suppose my role is to deep dive further with agents and help them fully understand and feel comfortable to promote Fred Olsen.

“While 2020 might be a year many of us would rather forget, our pause in operations gave us a really unique opportunity to consider every element of our business and our brand, including how we work with and support our agents,” adds Tingley. “My role is designed to complement the sales team members and the relationships that they have with those trade partners and help education of our brand to reach more agents than ever before.”

Reaching more agents is a key theme for lines, as is building long-term personal relationships. As Torey Kings-Hodkin, head of sales UK for Royal Caribbean International, explains: “Personal relationships are integral, which is why we have an extensive and experienced team of key account managers, which has been

expanded from six to nine people over the past six months. Our modules aren’t just limited to Royal brand or product knowledge. We want to help support the trade to grow in a wealth of areas such as business skills, providing content to grow the agents’ business holistically.”

In late August, Royal unveiled a refreshed training programme, in partnership with world traveller and entrepreneur Amar Latif. A new LEARN platform is available through its rewards and learning app, Club Royal Plus, and Club Royal website. The module is delivered by Latif, and agents will be able to work up from ‘Learner’ status to ‘Expert’ and finally ‘Guru’, before gaining access to the ‘Royal Guru’ accreditation.

Academy goals

It’s not just cruise lines that are looking for new ways to build knowledge, but also agencies themselves. Barrhead Travel has recently unveiled its new Cruise Academy – a virtual learning and development programme designed to expand its cruise offering. New and existing colleagues will be invited to participate in various tailored sessions, including bespoke native modules as well as sessions from key cruise partners.

“We already offered standalone cruise training and development opportunities, so launching the Cruise Academy will formalise this and help us home in on

more tailored training,” says Barrhead Travel president Jacqueline Dobson. “Having a division and resources that will solely focus on cruise will provide additional support to our specialist cruise departments as well as improving knowledge within our branch network.”

The Cruise Academy offers “an intense period of product immersion”, adds Dobson, alongside “conversation and communication skills and the systems and process knowledge required from cruise experts”. She continues: “We’ve been conducting weekly check-ins with those who have experienced the Cruise Academy training so far to help us identify successes and how we can work to improve the future offering.”

Meanwhile, Travel Counsellors has launched a digital cruise guide called Set Sail – a new tool where agents can find information and advice they need to book cruises. Travel Counsellors head of cruise Janet Whittingham says: “It features all cruise types available and is also housed alongside all other cruise line suites of training available. It’s very much a one stop shop for all our TCs’ training requirements. It’s interactive and constantly evolving.”

Putting it into practice

So, the tools available are increasing, but what do agents think? Owner of Project Paradise Travels Lizzi Schrecklinger says she loves “intense training, where I get the opportunity to really get to know the fleet, and everything any ship has to offer”. She adds: “The standards of online trainings do vary, although I have never seen poor standards when it comes to cruise training. Some of the major lines have provided truly outstanding online training, which consists of many training modules, and ensures that agents get a very deep insight in all aspects from the ships and destinations to accommodation, entertainment, shore excursions, and even tips on how to sell cruises to different types of clients.

“The best cruise lines are those that keep great relationships with the agent community and support them. Next to their training, they should provide opportunities to experience their ships, which many of them already do.”

Alan Witt, Not Just Travel, also highlights how training is increasingly becoming “very visual”, saying: “Any product training takes time, and it therefore takes a little individual time management to build that into your day, however it is something that is well worth doing, as I firmly believe you only get out what you put in, when it comes to learning new skills.”

In addition, Magical Traveller personal travel consultant Kieran Eccles-Miller is clear when it comes to the benefits of taking time to complete training modules. “It’s made my cruise business,” he explains. “Having ship visits or educationals has boosted my sales. I can prove that the lines I’ve had the best success at selling are the lines with approachable sales reps to answer questions, great online training and regular webinars/emails to keep you up to date or offer ship visits.

“Homeworkers are some of the most entrepreneurial people out there, they set up their own business for that reason. They may have new and exciting ways to promote a brand that traditional retail may not think about.”

A digital future?

As has been well documented, the rise of virtual training was expedited during the pandemic, offering a key lifeline for many. It’s place in the future of agent training is secure – and a welcome addition for many – but just how much of a role will it play?



While virtual training grew over the pandemic, in-person sessions are key to growing relationships

Kings-Hodkin says Royal Caribbean is keen to offer “as many different options as possible”. “Everybody learns differently... at Royal we want to be able to offer as many different options as possible, so we’re in the process of hiring a new in-person trainer for the EMEA region.”

Tingley also highlights Fred Olsen’s commitment to face-to-face communication and in-person events, as “we’re social beings and meeting actual people enables much more natural interaction. For all those advancements in technology, in my opinion, nothing can quite replace the impact of face-to-face communications to build those partnerships.”

Whittingham agrees, stating: “For us we don’t want to take that personal element out of our training schedules. The heart of our business is all about relationships with both our customers and our cruise partners.”

A hybrid approach, says Barrhead’s Dobson, “will offer the best benefits to agents in the long run”. This view is borne out when the question is put to other agents. Eccles-Miller says: “I can’t stress enough how helpful it is to get on board and get a feel for each line and what makes them different... you can make a connection with the brand managers or the product when you can see the passion in their eyes.” Fred Olsen Travel assistant manager Tom Holland also highlights how “sometimes webinars are in the middle of the day, which is hard when you’re busy”.

As for the immediate changes in the format of training, there’s a belief that many businesses – both agency and supplier side – will “invest further in training for their people over the coming years”, says Dobson. She also says it will be “important to make sure that appropriate refreshers or shorter [training] sessions are available to complement longer-form training, particularly for agents who are true experts in their fields. This would be perfect for top-up sessions for experienced consultants to help them keep on top of new trends.”

At Fred Olsen, the line is working on generating feedback from agents. “We ask ourselves: ‘How can we make this simple for the agents to sell us?’ So that’s what we’re doing at the moment. Lots of investigation, lots of feedback and lots of progression,” explains Tingley.

And that – asking, probing, seeing what works and what doesn’t, mixing in-person and digital – will no doubt see training continue to change. 📌





Watch & win

Regent Seven Seas Cruises has unveiled a new webinar series offering agent partners the chance to learn and win big

Regent Seven Seas Cruises, the world's leading luxury ocean cruise line, has launched a new webinar series for travel agents – known as Grow Your Regent Business – to help agents boost their business and attract more clients to the world of luxury cruising.

If that wasn't incentive enough, agents who attend all three webinars and take a post-series survey will have the opportunity to win a cruise to sail on board the ultra-luxurious *Seven Seas Explorer*, with a guest, on a 2023 cruise to the mesmeric destination that is Alaska.

Hosted by the line's vice-president global marketing Caroline Smith, and senior director of UK sales Paul Beale, the three-part series aims to give partners the skills to earn some of the highest commissions in the industry.

Agent commitment

Each 20-minute webinar – Where to Find Regent Guests, Segmentation Insights and Data-Driven Marketing Tactics – is packed with tactics and tips backed by a robust customer segmentation study. The

DATES

WEBINAR 1

Tuesday 18 October

–

WEBINAR 2

Tuesday 25 October

–

WEBINAR 3

Tuesday 1 November

Agents who attend the webinars could win a cruise to Alaska

research, which mapped psychographic and behavioural factors of luxury cruise guests and prospects through quantitative and qualitative data points, will be exclusive to Regent Seven Seas Cruises' agent network.

Agents will learn how to target first-time Regent guests by identifying its key customer segments and capitalise on current demand for luxury voyages.

Smith says: "At Regent Seven Seas Cruises we are committed to supporting our valued Travel Partners, and want to continue growing our business together. Our research shows that, with demand for luxury cruising such as it is, there is an incredible opportunity for the UK travel trade to earn more today."

Beale adds: "As we look towards 2023 and beyond, these webinars are just the start of what will be a full programme of investment and support for our valued travel partners."

"For those travel partners who attend the series, a host of exclusive resources and materials will be unlocked, teaching them how to capitalise on the recent valuable and fascinating findings from our customer segmentation study. These new resources will be an invaluable asset to their luxury cruise business." 📌

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In conversation with...



P&O Cruises' Ruth Venn

It's been all go for **Ruth Venn** since she took over as director of sales at P&O Cruises, and there's plenty happening over the coming months, as she tells Gary Peters

The enthusiasm is plain to see and hear as P&O Cruises director of sales Ruth Venn discusses her initial few months in the job and what's to come for the brand over the near future.

"It's been really exciting," she explains. "Coming in at a time of connecting again with our partners, there have been opportunities to move back to face-to-face communication and build on this. We're in a good place at the moment and we're starting to plan for 2023."

"For the first time in a long time, we can have a much more strategic approach, with fewer unknowns. We've

had some strong messages to push out to agent partners, thinking about how we build on what has been working and how we can do more of it.

"We've introduced our monthly Facebook Live, which is an interactive session for travel agents to learn and to hear more about us, campaigns that we have coming up and any key promotional opportunities."

One of Venn's key priorities to date has been helping the line adapt to the changing landscape of the agent world and make-up. For example, there are "more homeworkers, so we need to think about how they can log on and have bitesize content, accessible when they

need it, so it's not necessarily as structured as before," says Venn. "We have short videos and some quick tips that we can provide. It's a variation of tools available, flexible in terms of how the agent would like to learn."

Arvia's arrival

An increase in learning opportunities is no surprise given that, come December, the line will celebrate the launch of its new ship. The 5,200-guest *Arvia*, a sister ship to *Iona*, will join the fleet in December, with a maiden 14-night Canary Islands voyage, taking the fleet to seven ships and representing the next stage in the line's growth plans.



The retractable SkyDome on *Arvia* transforms the daytime pool into a night-time entertainment venue



Sample the sushi at Green & Co feat. Mizuhana. Photo: Partner Ship Design

“Once people have been on *Arvia*, they will want to come back again”

In late August, P&O Cruises revealed the ship – to be powered by liquefied natural gas – will feature more than 30 places to eat and drink, with new menus by its Local Food Heroes Shivi Ramoutar and José Pizarro. *Arvia* will also be home to new restaurants created exclusively for the ship, including Green & Co feat. Mizuhana and 6th Street Diner.

Elsewhere on board, there will be what the line says is the first escape room experience at sea, called Mission Control. This will combine “an escape game with multimedia simulation and a live-action story”, according to a statement, and include two one-hour experiences – a family friendly adventure suitable for all ages and an adventure designed for adults.

One particular highlight – or at least something that P&O Cruises hopes

will appeal and attract new guests – is the partnership to host *Greatest Days – The Official Take That Musical* on board. The ship will be the only place in the world to watch the show,

which is an adaptation of the West End musical *The Band*, featuring the songs of Take That.

There is also an exclusive partnership with Tidal Rum, which will create a unique rum blend especially for *Arvia*’s Caribbean sailings. The rum’s maiden production will take place on board the ship in the first rum distillery at sea.

“Innovation is key,” says Venn. “The launch of *Arvia* brings new concepts to the brand, and she is what we call our sunshine ship, sailing in and out of the Caribbean and then doing western Mediterranean itineraries. Once people have been on board they will want to come back again. It’s about how we keep pushing that innovation forward.”

Venn continues: “The Caribbean itineraries we see as important for newcomers; a lot of new to cruise do take cruises to the Caribbean. Those itineraries will also be great opportunity to experience all the outside areas that are available.”

Long-term thinking

The launch of *Arvia* gives P&O Cruises an obvious place in which to hang its hat, spread its message and increase bookings into 2023. This does, at the time of writing, come against the



Guests can tackle the first escape room experience at sea, Mission Control

backdrop of the cost-of-living crisis and rising bills for households, but Venn is confident cruise demand will hold up.

“Value for money and what’s included in the price of a cruise holiday with P&O Cruises, those messages seem to be resonating with guests at the moment,” she says. “For 2023, we’re in a strong place and hope to hit the ground running as we go into wave.”

“What’s going to be important over the next few months is making sure we’re set up and ready for 2023,” Venn continues. “As we know, wave is such an important selling phase, so we’re looking at, again, how we continue to innovate, how we can bring training into life, making sure agents are aware of our campaigns and that we’re present, available and listening to their needs.”

The phrase that Venn returns to more than once during the conversation is “longer-term commitment and stability”, based on the fact that 2022 has to date been far more predictable than the preceding two years.

The cruise sector “feels positive”, she says, and there’s nothing like the impending arrival of a new ship – a sunshine ship, no less – to warm the hearts of agents. 📌



Arvia will join the fleet in December

Win at **Selling**

LGBTQ+ cruises

When it comes to inclusivity, cruise has the opportunity to become the holiday of choice for people from all walks of life

As Jo Rzymowska, Celebrity Cruises vice-president and MD EMEA, explains: “The world no longer exists of mum, dad and 2.4 kids – travellers are wonderfully diverse. The ‘artificially perfect’ images associated with traditional luxury are gradually being discarded across many sectors.”

With perceptions changing, it opens the debate of how the cruise sector and agents can expand their reach and attract a more diverse client base to enjoy their holidays at sea, and Celebrity Cruises has been at the forefront of driving this change.

“Inclusivity is at the heart of everything we do,” says Rzymowska. “For us, all-inclusive means that we create an environment where all travellers and crew are encouraged to embrace their



“It is our collective responsibility to make our industry inclusive to the LGBTQ+ community”

true selves when they sail with us.”

The proof is in the pudding. “We were one of the first cruise lines to embrace legal same-sex marriages at sea, and each year we host an iconic Pride Party at Sea across our fleet to celebrate our LGBTQ+ guests and crew,” continues Rzymowska.

“On each of our cruises, we host LGBTQ+ welcome parties, hosted by senior officers, as well as regular self-led meet ups throughout the cruise. These are proudly advertised as LGBTQ+ meetups, ensuring full transparency of our support for people from all backgrounds. Through investment in training for all our staff, we create a welcoming atmosphere that our LGBTQ+ guests tell their friends about.”

A journey, not a destination

Rzymowska says it’s “so important that LGBTQ+ guests are treated with the same respect as all guests,” adding, “Cruising excels in bringing together communities. We have celebrated

our LGBTQ+ guests for as long as I remember, and we have built a reputation for embracing all guests.”

Despite the progress made to date and the innovations described, Rzymowska points to research that shows “73 per cent of the LGBTQ+ community feel that the travel industry needs to show more diversity in their marketing materials”.



As such, earlier this year Celebrity launched the All Inclusive Photo Project to “improve the representation of all people who travel, by sharing a completely free, open-source image library full of stunning travel images of diverse changemakers”, explains Rzymowska.

This project will evolve over time, as Rzymowska points out: “It is a journey not a destination, so there will be more to come in the future. It has taken decades of campaigning to bring equality to the forefront, and there is still work to be done. We must all play our part to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion are the norm across the industry.

“It is our collective responsibility to make sure travellers are heard and to make our industry inclusive to the LGBTQ+ community so that everyone can benefit from the enriching experience that travel brings.” 🌈

SELLING TIPS

To become a more diverse seller, practise deep listening and do not shy away from asking questions, recommends Rzymowska

• Understanding clients’ individual needs is imperative. “Something as simple as requesting a queen bed rather than two twin beds for a gay couple will make all the difference to holidaymakers’ first impressions,” says Rzymowska

• Celebrity has unconscious bias and sensitivity training for shoreside staff and crew. “Travel agents should look into the training that is available to them, either through their head office or online platforms such as LinkedIn Learning,” says Rzymowska



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Spotlight On



Travel 1st's journey

Lee Ashton has worked in cruise for many years and during the pandemic took the bold step to start Travel 1st. He shares his story and message of inspiration for fellow travel agents

I was furloughed at the beginning of the pandemic, so began thinking about other options," Ashton tells *Cruise Trade News*. "I reached out to Lee Evans, a friend of mine and former colleague. We spoke about setting up our own agency, and he then got in touch with his friend Greg Barratt who has a finance background and the three of us created Travel 1st.

"Cruise is a passion of mine [and over the years] I have built great relationships with the trade. We know cruise is a perfect holiday, which provides endless opportunities for clients to enjoy their ultimate getaway – there is something for every traveller."

There have been many months of hard work since then, but the signs look promising, with Ashton highlighting how the agency looks to reward repeat clients. "We offer a face-to-face mobile service for our clients, as we really value repeat customers and think it is important to give people a reason to return," he explains.

'Never give up'

The agency prides itself on the little, personal touches. "For example, if a

"We will expand through excursions, ski and open a retail store"

customer books a trip with us, we will thank them with a bottle of wine or champagne," says Ashton. "We'd rather be personal and customer friendly instead of behaving like a big business and sending lots of spam emails and losing that personal touch. Repeat customers, tailor-made holidays and customer satisfaction are paramount to us.

"Cruise lines have really supported me in my journey, and I work closely with many of the big names. They offer support and are very helpful. For instance, they allow me to make changes, offer a 24-hour service and, overall, I find them very helpful and accommodating."

Ashton is also buoyed by what he sees as the increasing importance of travel agents in today's world. "Travel agents are more important than ever, especially in light of the aftermath of the

pandemic. We take away the worry and any anxieties customers may have and we are a source of reliability, providing trust where it is needed most.

"My message of inspiration would be even though some days are tougher than others, never give up, think of the bigger picture and there is always light at the end of the tunnel."

As for the next steps for Travel 1st, Ashton and his colleague are dreaming big. "[We will] expand through excursions, ski and opening a retail store – our sales are up by 1000 per cent." 📈



LEE ASHTON
FOUNDER
TRAVEL 1ST



Fast Facts

Norwegian Prima is the first of six new ships within the next class of vessels from Norwegian Cruise Line – the Prima class. The ship – billed as the most spacious new cruise ship in the world – offers plenty of outdoor deck space as well as roomy cabins and bathrooms. On board, guests can enjoy new features - the Indulge Food Hall, Infinity Beach, Oceanwalk and The Concourse. Elsewhere, there is the Prima Speedway, which is longer, larger and zoomier than ever, and the first three-level racetrack at sea.

3,100
PASSENGERS

1,506
CREW

4
INFINITY HOT TUBS

965
FEET IN LENGTH

1
RACETRACK

Norwegian Prima



1



Entertainment

There is plenty to do on board, with highlights including Broadway-style show *Summer: The Donna Summer Musical*, hosted in the world's first venue that transforms from a three-storey theatre into a Vegas-style nightclub, 10-storey freefall dry slide The Drop and the largest racetrack at sea.

2



Restaurants

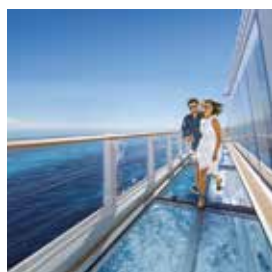
Guests should look out for the new Indulge Food Hall. Here, they will find various different food venues including the Q Texas Smokehouse, serving American Southern comfort food; Tamara, offering Indian and veggie dishes; and the Tapas Food Truck with Spanish-inspired street food.



3

Atrium

One of the stand-out features on *Norwegian Prima* is the cruise line's first three-storey high Atrium. Spanning decks six, seven and eight, the glass-walled Penrose Atrium is decorated with a huge chandelier. This also includes the Whiskey Bar, the Prima Casino and Starbucks Coffee.



4

Ocean Boulevard

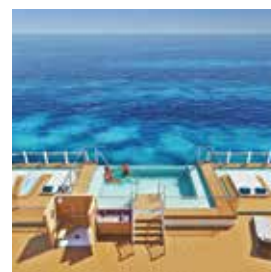
The Ocean Boulevard wraps around the entirety of deck eight, allowing guests to walk around the ship and experience amazing ocean views while enjoying outdoor activities on the way. Highlights include The Concourse, featuring seven sculptures and Infinity Beach, with two infinity pools.



5

Cabins

Norwegian Prima elevates the whole NCL experience, not least with accommodation. The ship offers a huge variety of suite categories, as well as the largest three-bedroom suites of any new cruise ship. On board, the oceanview and balcony staterooms will be the largest ever found on a NCL ship.



6

The Haven

The Haven is NCL's exclusive suite complex. Spanning suites and public areas, the luxurious ship-within-a-ship area provides private amenities and the most luxurious accommodation on board. All 107 Haven suites are situated next to lifts that take guests to The Haven public areas on decks 16 and 17.

The Doha EXPERIENCE

Gary Peters travels to Qatar to experience some of the top highlights on offer and discovers how the country is eager to boost its cruise industry

As a country, Qatar cannot be accused of playing it safe or lacking ambition. As I write this, it is only weeks away from hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup. The eyes of the world will be on Qatar for a month when it welcomes fans from across the globe, with all the pomp and ceremony that comes with what is considered the biggest and most important sporting tournament on the planet.

While non-football fans will claim it is only a footballing occasion, there is undeniable glamour and prestige that comes with the World Cup. Speaking somewhat biasedly as a football fanatic, it can – when there is a coherent legacy plan in place – drastically transform a country's image and place it even higher upon the world stage. A myriad of nationalities will descend, many of whom will experience the country, and in particular the capital Doha, for the very first time.

I happen to be one of these first timers, with a week-long trip taking place in the middle of September to better understand how Qatar intends to grow its cruise industry and force its way into the minds of cruise line executives and passengers. I admit to being a little anxious before setting off, as it can sometimes be hard to shake off pre-conceived ideas no matter how much reading material or individual accounts you consume.

Qatar hopes to position itself as a world-class destination for cruise passengers

Past, present and future

I need not worry, however. Due to a late flight into Doha, it's not until the following morning that I begin to soak in the Qatari experience, and from the off it puts a smile on my face. A packed itinerary starts with a full tour of the National Museum of Qatar, an immersive space telling the story of the country's past, present and future.

Opened in 2019, it is stylish, with its mind-bending architecture and desert rose design offering its own unique selling point. Inside, it does what all good museums do – narrating, through displays and interactive points, the ins and outs of Qatari life throughout the ages. For me, where the National Museum of Qatar stands out is with its flow, literally pulling visitors into the stories it is telling.

I experience some of this, in person, during a tour of Msheireb, downtown Doha. Classed as the old town area, it has



Doha's skyline contrasts its traditional ways with its modern architecture

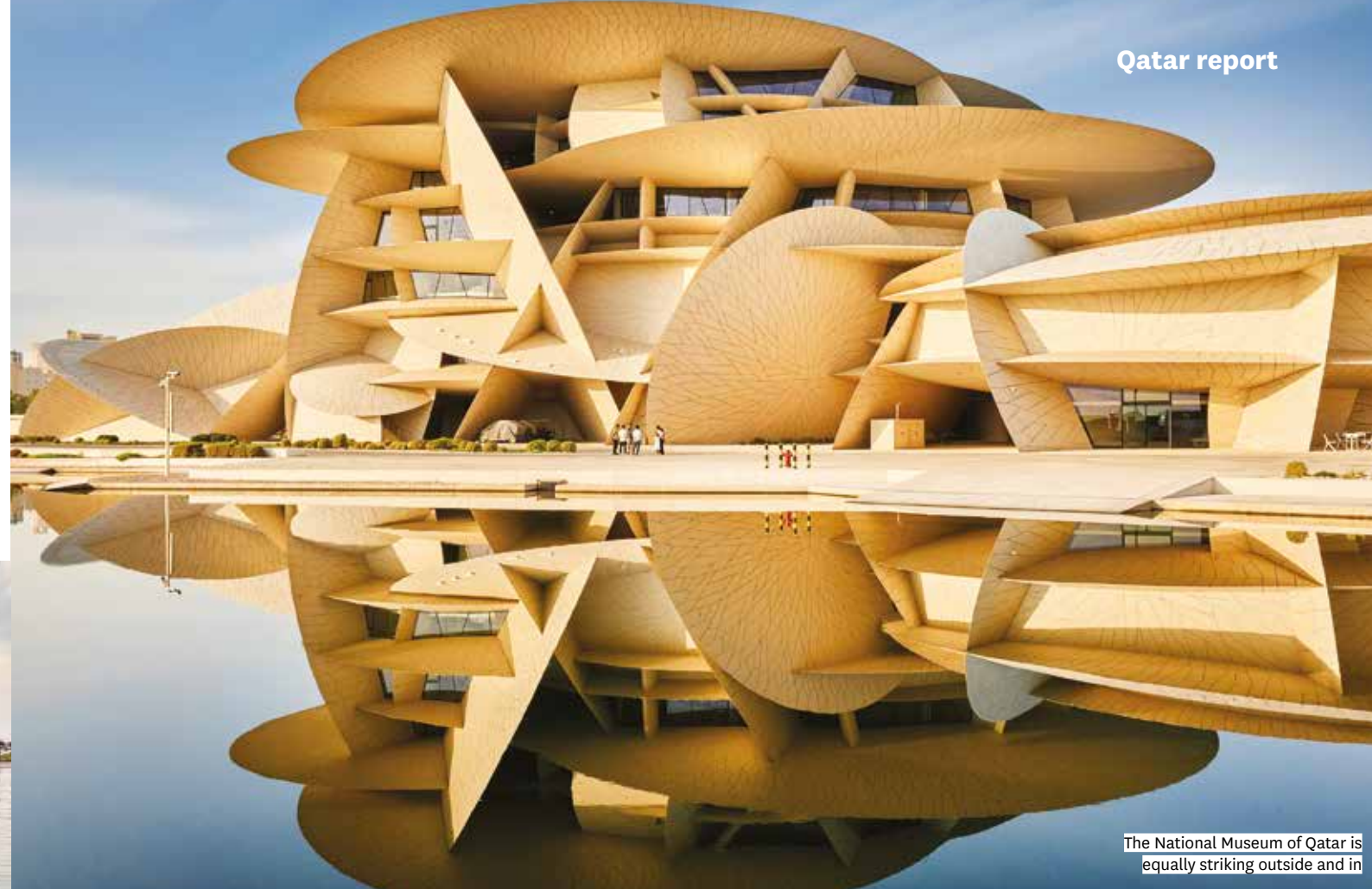
been completely renovated, and now features a free tram network for easy transportation. It is also one of the world's first sustainable downtown regeneration projects, using, according to the experts, sustainable technology and green building standards.

Something else that is new in Doha is the metro system. Opened in 2019, this network is connected to all the World Cup stadia and has drastically improved transport in the city, even though walking is still a viable option. Just a stroll from my hotel is the Souq Waqif, somewhere I am most eager to see, and something that surely proves equally popular with cruise passengers.

This historic, bustling marketplace has dozens of alleyways and stalls dotted around, with all manner of goods available to buy. There are traditional Qatari delicacies and authentic knick-knacks that no gift shop could compete with. Amazing aromas fill the air as I take a very intentionally slow walk through the nooks and crannies, stopping in various shops where the welcome is warm, relaxed and personal.



The Souq Waqif marketplace, renowned for its myriad of stalls



The National Museum of Qatar is equally striking outside and in

Sand dune fun

Everywhere I look in Doha, there is ongoing construction work. These new projects, mixed in with what is already complete, demonstrate in clear detail the huge amount of work and investment that has been pumped into the city in recent years. One such new development is the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, located at the Khalifa International Stadium, which itself is the heart of the Doha Sports City complex.

Here, there are numerous displays of the history of different sports, including football and many Olympic events. Olympic medals and torches from summer and winter games can

be seen, and even for those not hugely interested in sports, it is a fascinating deep-dive experience.

I also travel to the Katara Cultural Village, opened in 2010, and which is available as a shore excursion for cruise guests. This is home to galleries, concert halls and a spectacular amphitheatre. Qatar Tourism describes it as place which acts as a “guardian to the heritage and traditions” of Qatar.

My final afternoon in Doha involves an exhilarating desert safari, riding the sand dunes in fits of laughter but thankfully no motion sickness. As daylight turns to dusk, I settle down to eat, overlooking the sea, with a fresh breeze finally taking the edge off the heat and humidity, before a night-time journey back through the desert, with nothing but the stars for illumination.

Cruise targets

As demonstrated, Doha is not short on things to do. The question will be, can Qatar meet its ambitious aim of trebling visitor numbers to six million by 2030? Cruise has an important role to play in hitting this target. The new Grand Cruise Terminal – large enough for two mega

ships – opens very soon and will host the naming ceremony of MSC Cruises’ *MSC World Europa* on 13 November.

When that news was announced in early September, Qatar Tourism and Qatar Airways Group chief executive Akbar Al Baker added: “Qatar has taken important steps to position itself as a world class destination for cruise passengers and the naming ceremony of *MSC World Europa* in Doha is another landmark event as we grow this important tourism sector.”

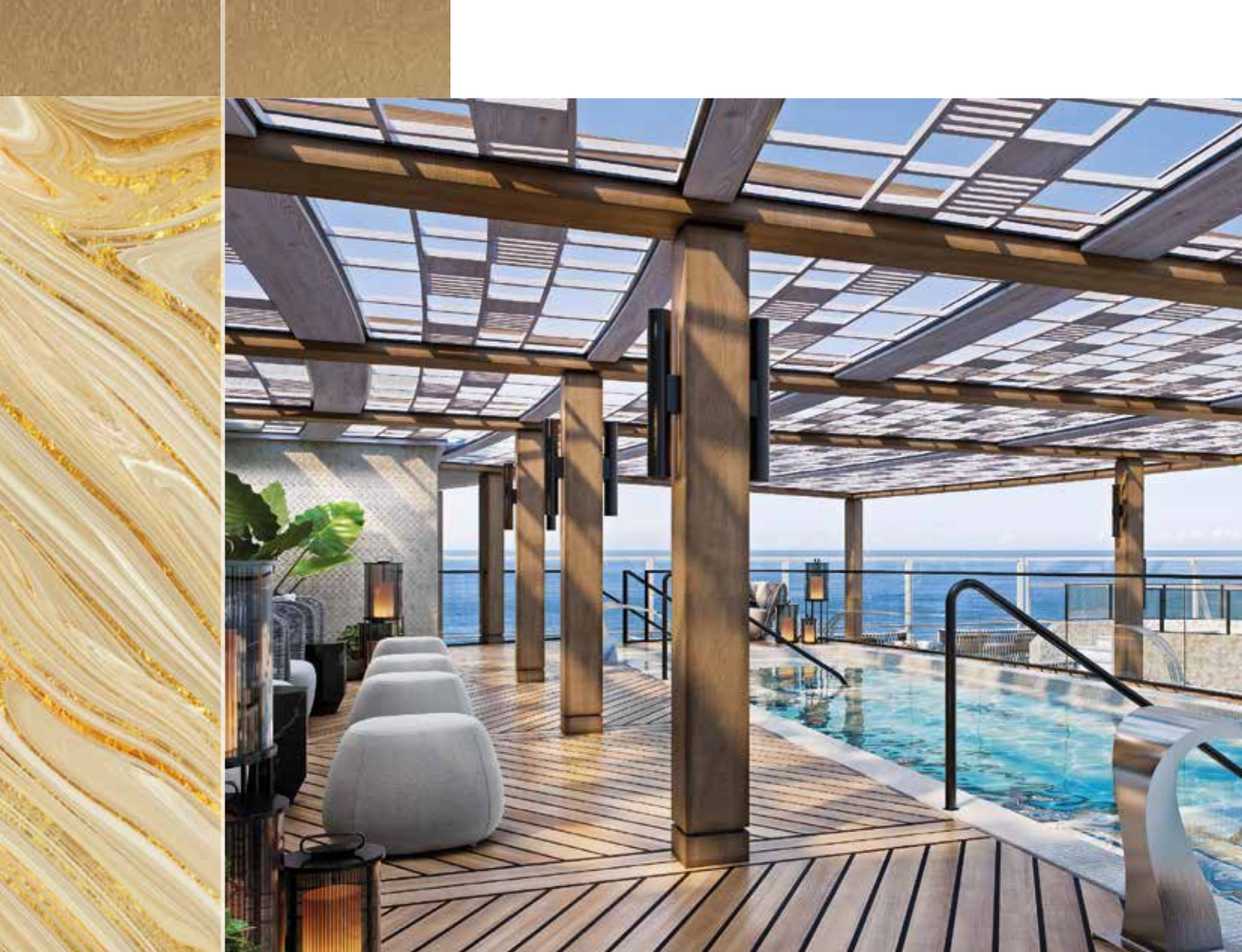
It’s not just MSC, however. *Emerald Azzurra*, the first superyacht from Emerald Cruises, will cruise from Doha, starting in January 2023, operating seven-night itineraries. Pre and post cruise tours will also be available, including a three-day package to explore the sites and culture of Qatar.

The 2023/24 cruise season will run from November through to April, with approximately 120 cruise calls expected. There is also a belief that, as its cruise story grows and reaches more people, other cruise lines will look to follow suit.

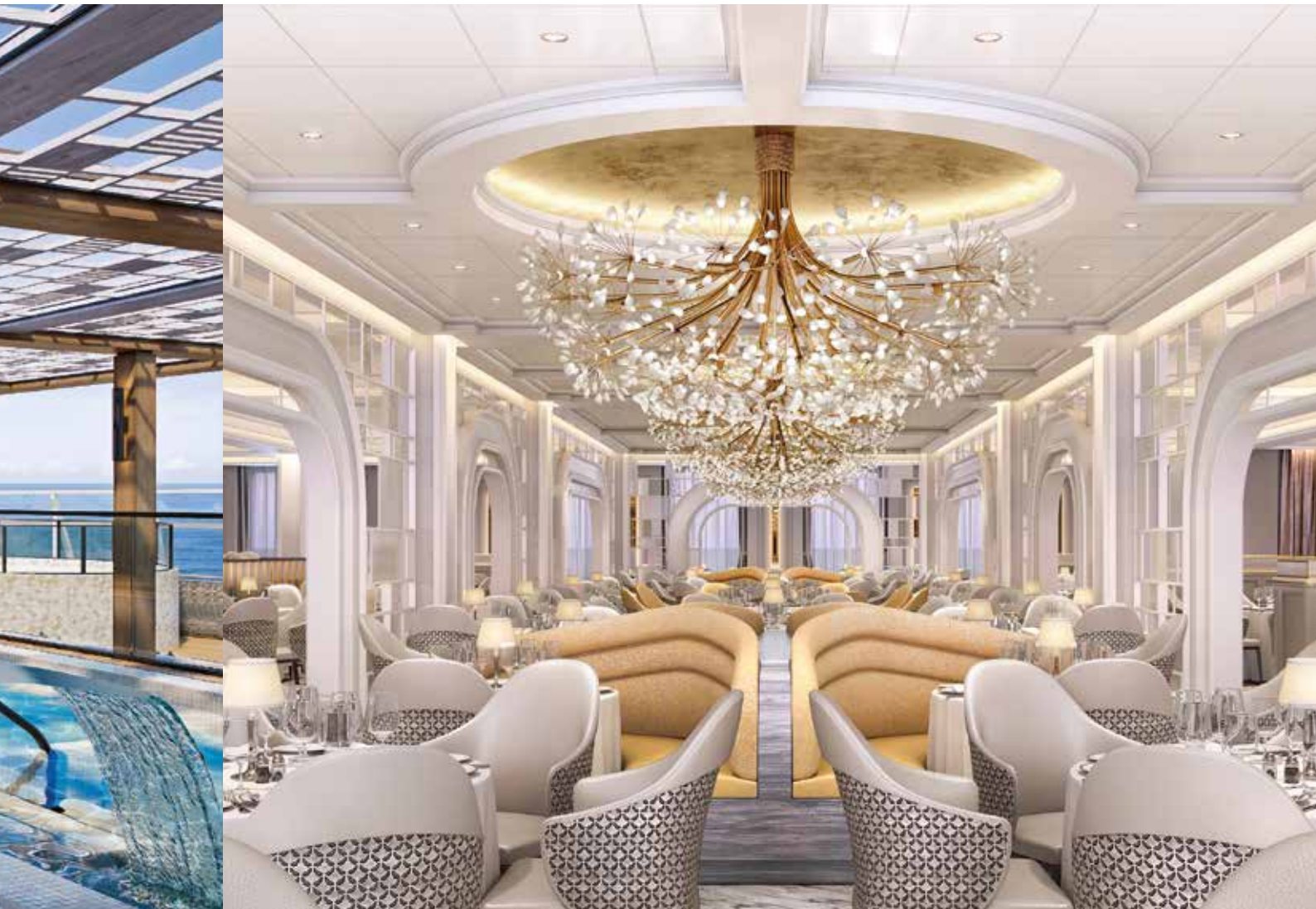
As the countdown to the World Cup continues, the future is set to be anything but dull for Qatar. 📍

Msheireb, the world’s first sustainable downtown regeneration project





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JOIN THE CLUB

Royal Caribbean director of sales UK, Ireland and Spain **Stuart Byron** speaks to Lucy Abbott about the line's support for trade partners and its updates to Club Royal

What was the reaction to the launch of *Wonder of the Seas*?

It has been spectacular – I think it came at just the right time. An important thing from a brand perspective is that we haven't stood still and now we're back with the entire fleet sailing again. Having *Wonder of the Seas* as our newest, latest, and greatest hardware operating in Europe has just been fabulous.

It's been a great opportunity to get the trade engaged with the brand; we had the Get Me on Wonder competition, giving agents the opportunity to get on board, and we had two inaugural sailings – in total, we had almost 5,000 agents on the ship over those two inaugural sailings. Having *Wonder of the Seas* in Europe shows how important this region is to us.



Stuart Byron has been working hard on taking onboard feedback from the trade

How are you building trade relationships?

We've always enjoyed very close working relationship with our trade partners. What we have been working hard on recently is listening to feedback from the trade about how we can make a difference. So, I would like to think that our Mini Wave campaign that we launched on 1 September shows that we've listened to the feedback and we've acted on it.

We've gone into Mini Wave with a flight to Europe from £1 campaign and we've taken more air seats than we have ever before. We're providing as many of the tools as we possibly can to make the job for the trade as hassle free as possible. We've also launched a new trade training platform called LEARN on the Club Royal Plus app, making it easier for agents to access our e-learning content on mobile, tablet and desktop.

We recognise there are a lot of new faces in the sector now, so there's a lot of knowledge to build and we need to do everything we can to help with that. In addition, we've run training sessions on board; on *Anthem of the Seas* this summer we ran a special ship visit targeting homeworkers, enabling us to give that audience their own bespoke visit and to answer their specific questions about how best to sell Royal Caribbean.

Can you provide more detail about Club Royal and what it offers?

Club Royal has been around for a few years and is the hub for all things Royal and is the home of our all our latest news and updates, as well as campaign materials and



Icon of the Seas, the first in a new class, will launch next year

marketing assets. It's where agents can go to access the e-learning content I mentioned earlier; and it also provides access to prizes and competitions. It is also home to Rewards, our incredibly successful loyal programme, which gives us the opportunity to thank and reward agents for their sales success with Royal, as they can earn up to £15 per booking. It really is the first port of call for all things Royal.

What support do you have for homeworkers and how are you building on that?

It's certainly something we have seen a shift towards over the course of the pandemic. During the lockdowns,



Having *Wonder of the Seas* in Europe has shown how much Royal Caribbean values the region



Homeworkers were invited to a special ship visit to experience *Anthem of the Seas*

“Icon of the Seas is the first in a new class of ship... I can’t tell you all the detail, but it is going to be beyond exciting”

everyone was a homeworker for a period of time and we’ve seen a lot of growth in terms of the homeworking side of travel businesses. That will continue to grow and evolve and we do recognise there are different ways in which to support the homeworker community.

Within Club Royal we have a Homeworkers Hub, which is a dedicated part of that platform specifically aimed at homeworkers to give them the tools

and information they need. We had the dedicated ship visit on *Anthem of the Seas* that I mentioned and we provide regular virtual webinar coffee mornings. The sales team are out to meet as many of our frontline agent partners as possible.

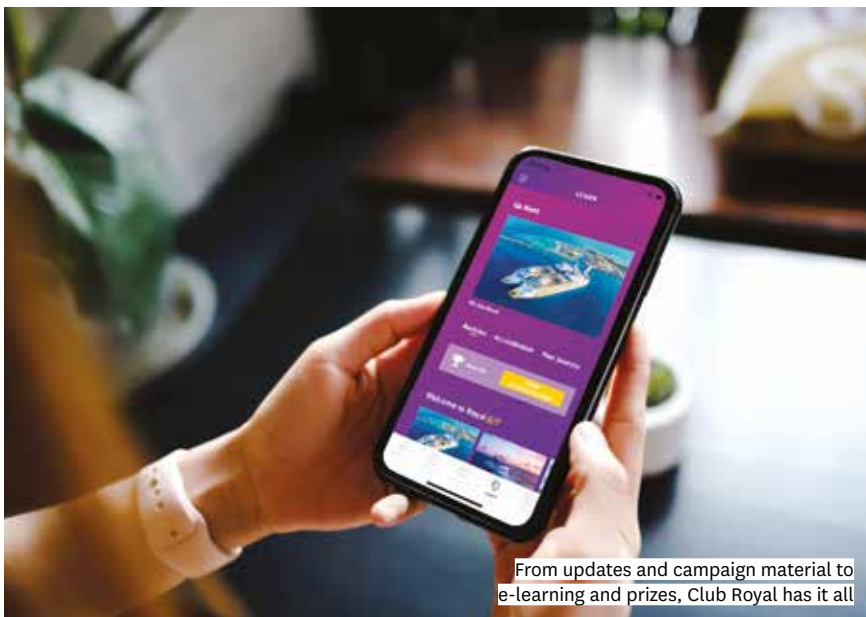
We’re also dedicating specific time to meet as many homeworkers as possible through live events. We’ll continue to learn and adapt and do more.

Next year sees the launch of the *Icon of the Seas*. How will this ship build on what Royal provides?

It is the first in a new class of ship and we’re very excited about it. I can’t tell you all the detail now, but it is going to be beyond exciting. I’d urge agents to watch out for the video updates that are coming out, which will provide a few hints about what’s to come. A real ambition of mine is to enable as many UK agents as possible to see *Icon of the Seas*. We absolutely see huge benefit in ship visits and experiencing the product – and this one will blow their minds.

What are some of the itinerary highlights guests can expect for 2023?

One of the positives over the last couple of years is that we have viewed Europe as an opportunity for further expansion, with more ships sailing in Europe than ever before. Barcelona will continue to be one of our marquee programmes with *Symphony of the Seas* sailing out of the city next summer. We then have *Odyssey of the Seas* sailing from Rome, and *Anthem* sailing out of Southampton. There’s real variety of hardware and itineraries, with something to suit everyone, from couples through to multi-generational families. 📍



From updates and campaign material to e-learning and prizes, Club Royal has it all

WAVE
AWARDS 2022



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**Royal Caribbean
International**

THE WAVE AWARDS 2022

Who will win this year?

Discover who is on the shortlist for the judged
categories in the Wave Awards 2022

The 'Oscars of cruising' – which this year runs in partnership with Fred Olsen Cruise Lines – recognises cruise lines, travel agents, tourist boards and ports from both a trade and consumer perspective. This year, there were a record number of entries across a range of categories, judged by a panel of cruise and travel experts.

Cruise Trade News editor Gary Peters said: "It's always a great moment to reveal the finalist shortlist for the Wave Awards. This year, we have hit a record

number of entries, demonstrating that cruise is truly back to its best following a tough couple of years.

"There is so much innovation taking place across the sector, and rightly the hard work and success of many will be recognised at the awards ceremony. We wish everyone the best of luck."

The awards are organised and produced by Real Response Media, which publishes *Cruise Trade News* and *World of Cruising* magazines and their respective websites.



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SPONSORS



2022 SHORTLIST

Agent categories

- Advantage Travel Partnership
- Barrhead Travel Group
- Bolsover Cruise Club
- Cruise Direct
(by Barrhead Travel Group)
- Cruise118.com
- Cruise2.com
- Hays Travel
- Imagine Cruising
- Mundy Cruising
- Panache Cruises
- Paramount Cruises
- ROL Cruise
- Six Star Cruises

Cruise line categories

- Amadeus River Cruises
- Ambassador Cruise Line
- APT & Travelmarvel
- Aurora Expeditions
- Avalon Waterways
- Azamara
- Cunard
- Fred Olsen Cruise Lines
- Hapag-Lloyd Cruises
- Havila Voyages
- Holland America Line
- Marella Cruises
- Oceania Cruises
- MSC Cruises
- Nicko Cruises
- Norwegian Cruise Line
- P&O Cruises
- Ponant
- Princess Cruises
- Regent Seven Seas Cruises
- Riviera Travel

- Royal Caribbean International
- Saga
- Seabourn
- Star Clippers
- The Majestic Line (Scotland)
- The Scenic Group
- Marella Cruises
- Uniworld River Cruises
- Viking Ocean Cruises
- Virgin Voyages

Industry categories

- ABP Southampton
- Accord Marketing
(for Ambassador Cruise Line)
- Accord Marketing
(for Celebrity Cruises)
- Accord Marketing (for ROL)
- A-Rosa River Cruises
- Aurora Expeditions
- Avalon Waterways
- Cosmos
- Hapag-Lloyd Cruises
- Havila Voyages
- Imagine Cruising
- Intercruises
- Just You
- Marella Cruises
- MSC Cruises
- Musement
- Norwegian Cruise Line
- Ponant
- Port of Dover
- Riviera Travel
- Saga
- Titan Travel
- Travelsphere
- Virgin Voyages

On-board categories

- Aurora Expeditions
- Avalon Waterways
- Fred Olsen Cruise Lines
- Havila Voyages
- Holland America Line
- Marella Cruises
- Norwegian Cruise Line
- Oceania Cruises
- Regent Seven Seas Cruises
- Royal Caribbean International
- Saga
- Seabourn
- Virgin Voyages

Port & destination categories

- ABP Southampton
- Azamara
- Intercruises
- Marella Cruises
- Port of Jamaica
- Portsmouth International Port
- Regent Seven Seas Cruises
- Venture Ashore

The Wave Awards will be held at the Pan Pacific London hotel on 16 November 2022. To book tickets, go to thewaveawards.com/book-tickets

Asia awaits

Thanks to a wave of new ship launches, Asia is being dubbed the 'hot ticket' for river cruising as 2023 approaches. **Sarah Holt** reports



As should be expected from the earth's largest continent, Asia is veined with rivers. Navigable waterways course through Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, India and China and cruises in this region introduce passengers to some of the world's most vital places. This is a land of livewire cities, unplumbed jungles and countrysides covered in a confetti of temples and shrines.

Sadly, the Asian river cruise market was one of the hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic and cruise lines, on the whole, have been shy about resuming full operations in the region. However, a wave of new and upcoming ship launches and new product offerings means that the wind is well and truly back in the market's sails as we move towards the end of 2022 and into 2023.

"2022 has been the year of European travel as guests found their feet and

eased back into international travel," APT and Travelmarvel head of sales and business development Brad Bennetts, explains. "But the hot ticket for 2023 is Asia, with customers visibly setting their sights on longer haul destinations next year."

James Talbot, sales and reservations manager at Pandaw, adds: "Demand for river cruising in Asia is strong. Both last-minute demand for late 2022, as well as advance bookings for 2023/24, are very good as guests look to find unique and memorable experiences post-pandemic that Asia can offer in abundance."

The big five

The Lower and Upper Mekong, Yangtze, Brahmaputra and Ganges are the five main rivers and river segments that Asian cruise itineraries tend to focus on. The Irrawaddy and Chindwin used to feature in the line-up, too, but the unrest in Burma means that these sailings are on hold for the time being.

Itineraries on the Lower Mekong vary, but Ho Chi Minh City to Siem Reap, Ho Chi Minh City to Phnom Penh and Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi – and vice versa – are common options. Whichever itinerary passengers choose here, they won't be on the ship the entire time. Land transportation, short flights and hotel stays are sprinkled into and around trips to ensure that cruise passengers get to make the most of the sights that surround the Mekong.

For example, due to the unpredictability of the water levels of Tonlé Sap Lake – the area of the Mekong that leads up to Siem Reap – many itineraries include a coach transfer to Siem Reap from Kampong Chhnang. Itineraries that feature time in Hanoi, meanwhile, will include a hotel stay in the city and a flight before or after a river cruise.

In August 2022, CroisiEurope became the first river cruise company to resume operations on the Lower Mekong and the line now has five small ships operating



The ornate Royal Palace in Phnom Penh with its lush gardens is a highlight for visitors to Cambodia

“This is a land of livewire cities, unplumbed jungles and countrysides covered in a confetti of temples and shrines”

eight-night itineraries between Ho Chi Minh City and Siem Reap.

The line's UK sales director John Fair says: “Our Mekong cruises allow guests to experience the vibrancy, colours, sights and smells of two fascinating countries – Cambodia and Vietnam – as they visit the temples of Angkor, the floating villages on Tonlé Sap Lake and charming Phnom Penh, as well as cruising along the Cho Gao Canal. A cruise on the Mekong is the perfect way to discover this region as guests can enjoy all the comfort of a river cruise ship with great food and service but they can also immerse themselves in the culturally rich excursions on offer.”

Cruises on the Upper Mekong are a different kettle of fish. Passengers usually stay on their ship the whole time as it bobs from Vientiane, the capital of Laos,

to Chiang Saen, passing tribal villages, waterfall ribboned jungles, and sights like Luang Prabang – a UNESCO recognised city of temples, monasteries and a daily sunrise procession of monks who walk through the streets accepting alms.

On the Yangtze, short river cruises tend to be the filling in a bigger land tour sandwich. Tauck, for example, offers a three-night Yangtze river cruise as part of its 16-day China, the Yangtze and Hong Kong trip. The cruise, on the *Yangtze Explorer*, sails from Chongqing to Yichang, passing through the Three Gorges, while the larger itinerary includes explorations of Beijing, Xi'an, Guilin, Shanghai and Hong Kong.

Brahmaputra cruises, meanwhile, introduce passengers to the northeast corner of India. Popular itineraries run round-trip from Guwahati or from Guwahati to Jorhat. Or there are longer cruises that combine time on the Brahmaputra with time on the Ganges.

For example, when Pandaw resumes its Brahmaputra sailings in November 2023, it will offer a 14-night Ganges and Brahmaputra itinerary that sails round-trip from Kolkata on the Ganges before flying passengers to Guwahati for a round-trip cruise on the



Expert VIEW

“ A Mekong cruise is the perfect way to discover and understand this fascinating, beautiful corner of the planet. It will transport your customers through a world of ancient temples and pagodas, Buddhist monasteries, busy port towns with colourful bustling markets, fishing farms and villages, as well as silver and silk cottage industries, sumptuous undiscovered evergreen islands, tranquil lakes, and wooded hills.”

WILL SARSON
Riviera Travel head of strategy and innovation

Brahmaputra. Cruises on the Ganges alone, meanwhile, usually sail round-trip from Kolkata. However, some cruise lines offer trips that include land tours before and/or after the cruise.

Avalon Waterways has a varied selection of these tour/cruise combos. The company's Colorful India & the Ganges River with Southern India, Varanasi & Kathmandu is the stuff of bucket lists. Guests begin their trip in Cochin in southern India before flying to Mumbai, Varanasi and Delhi, visiting Agra and Jaipur, then flying to Kolkata for the cruise on the *Ganges Voyager*. The experience ends with a flight to Kathmandu in Nepal.

Beyond the big five, some cruise lines offer cruises along the Red and Black rivers in northern Vietnam. These trips usually begin or end with time sailing around the UNESCO-listed Halong Bay, where thousands of jungle-matted limestone rocks spear out of the water like tropical icebergs.

RV *Indochine II* is one of CroisiEurope's five small ships on the Lower Mekong. Photo: Live Studio



River cruising



The turquoise waters of Kuang Si waterfall in Luang Prabang have to be seen to be believed



There is a lot to explore at the fascinating Angkor Thom complex in Siem Reap

Boosting capacity

A parade of new ships has already started to make its way onto the waterways of Asia. September saw the launch of the 80-passenger *Viking Saigon* on the Mekong. Featuring a combination of French balcony and veranda staterooms and suites, the ship is also home to a sky bar, a lounge bar with floor-to-ceiling windows, a spa, a library and a panoramic restaurant.

The ship will sail the 14-night Magnificent Mekong itinerary between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City that features stops in spots like Siem Reap, Kampong Cham and Phnom Penh.

In January 2023, APT's new *Mekong Serenity* will make its Mekong debut. The

88-passenger ship has been custom built for APT, and it features a sleek-looking sun deck with a swimming pool, a spa and wellness centre, and two restaurants, including an Indochine eatery where guests can indulge in five-course Vietnamese meals.

The vessel will sail two itineraries between January and March and July and December, including the 14-night Vietnam and Cambodia Highlights sailing.

APT's sister brand Travelmarvel will also welcome a new vessel to its fleet in 2023. Formerly sailing for APT, the *RV Apsara* is an all-balcony all-suite ship with room for 108 passengers. Facilities on board include a spa, the Mekong restaurant and the Saigon Lounge & Bar. The ship will sail four itineraries including the 14-night Essential Vietnam and Cambodia, which sails from Ho Chi Minh City to Siem Reap.

In mid-2023, Pandaw's new ship *RV Song Hong* will join its sister ship the *RV Angkor Pandaw* on Vietnam's Red and Black River network. The vessel will feature just 10 staterooms, which Pandaw says will be bigger than their standard-sized rooms.

Wendy Wu's *Victoria Mekong* is also relatively new to the Mekong. Said to be one of the greenest ships on the river, it's equipped with solar panels and a freshwater generator that processes river water into drinkable water. The ship will sail four-night upstream itineraries and three-night downstream cruises from Ho Chi Minh City to Phnom Penh and vice versa.

New experiences

As part of its commitment to giving back to local communities, Scenic has developed a range of new excursions for passengers. These include a Scenic

SELLING TIPS

Encourage clients to book ASAP by explaining they could be among the first guests to sail on Asia's newest river ships like *Viking Saigon*, *Mekong Serenity* and *RV Song Hong*

Tweak your sales pitch to tap into clients' growing post-pandemic zest for adventures outside of Europe

Explain to clients how Asia allows them to take river cruises in January, February and March – times of year when it can be too inclement to take European river cruises

ITINERARIES

CroisiEurope

- Eight-night Mekong cruise from Ho Chi Minh City to Siem Reap on *RV Lan Diep* is priced from £1,637pp, departing 22 December 2022.

↳ croisieurope.co.uk

Pandaw

- 10-night Halong Bay & The Red River Expedition with transfers to and from Hanoi on *RV Angkor Pandaw* is priced at \$3,580pp (£3,035), departing 24 January 2023.

↳ pandaw.com

Viking

- 14-night Magnificent Mekong cruise from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi on *Viking Saigon* is priced from £5,145pp, departing 14 August 2023.

↳ vikingrivercruises.co.uk

Freechoice Excursion – which is included in the price of a cruise – called Cows for Cambodia. Available in Siem Reap, this excursion introduces passengers to the work of Cows for Cambodia – a charitable organisation and self-proclaimed 'cow bank' that loans local families pregnant cows to look after and gifts them the calf when it's born.

"The guests who enjoy a Mekong river cruise the most are those who get involved with all of the activities, including trying different forms of transport, food and interactive activities with the locals," explains Scenic journey designer Adam Burke. "They may sometimes feel a little out of their comfort zone, particularly around the traffic, but if they have a try, taste and attempt everything offered, they will surprise themselves." ①

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The Mediterranean has some of Europe's best beaches, with plenty of sunshine throughout the year

Med IN HEAVEN

The Mediterranean offers blue skies, azure oceans and a diverse range of landscapes, cuisine and culture. **Nicole Carmichael** falls back in love with this timeless destination

Being just a few hours away from the UK, the Mediterranean is the perfect choice for first time and experienced cruisers alike. A wealth of different cultures awaits and it's not just the climate that's hotter than ever as cruise lines add more incentives for travellers to sail with them. New ships, new itineraries and exciting developments mean there's stiff competition for cruise lines in the Med, but that's good news for an industry potentially still smarting from the global pandemic.

At the time, it was catastrophic for the industry, but it appears the

market is stronger than ever with many people opting for shorter haul holidays over grand world tours. "Cruise has enthusiastically bounced back after the pandemic," says Travel 1st's Lee Ashton. "We have multiple customers old and new who enjoy booking cruises through us and cruising the Med caters for all tastes so every traveller can access their ideal holiday.

"The opportunities are endless as there are so many different ships to suit our customers. We have long-standing customers who love MSC Cruises, Royal Caribbean, Princess Cruises and Celebrity Cruises because there's so much to offer on board – fine dining, luxurious surroundings, excursions to suit every passenger and a first-class service."

A new world

The Mediterranean region offers some of Europe's most classic cultural landmarks, alongside some of its best weather. There's well-needed sunshine in the spring, super-hot summer days for serious sunbathers and a gorgeous late summer and autumn that can carry into the latter dates of October and beyond. And there's no end of places to visit.

History fans can head to Crete and see the Palace of Knossos where Theseus conquered the minotaur, tour ancient Roman amphitheatres and visit The Vatican, while film and tv buffs check out the locations for umpteen blockbusters. Whatever clients want to do – whether it's discovering famous art galleries, hiking through spectacular

The Palace of Knossos in Crete, where the mythical Theseus conquered the minotaur



Expert VIEW

“Cruise companies are really capitalising on families with younger members who might be discovering cruise for the first time. They know that if they can win them over, they’ve got them for life.”

ALAN WITT
Not Just Travel

countryside, shopping in some of Europe’s most exclusive boutiques, colourful wildlife watching, concert-going, or maybe even trying their hand at local artisan crafts – the Mediterranean is just the ticket. In fact, it’s hard to find something that clients can’t do in the Med – it’s even within easy reach of ski resorts.

Wine lovers and foodies will be spoilt for choice with the regional variations of each of the 22 countries that share the 46,000km Mediterranean coastline. Europe’s best beaches are found along the Med and every day holidaymakers can wake up to a totally new culture as this spectacular region takes in areas across the three continents of Africa, Asia and Europe. Some destinations may feel distinctly familiar such as Gibraltar and Cyprus, where drivers use the left side of the road and English is widely spoken, while other countries such as Egypt, Lebanon and Morocco offer an experience that’s unique. That’s why a Mediterranean cruise is so perfect – it opens up a whole new world.

And there are seas within the Mediterranean sea to discover – the



Only smaller vessels can navigate Greece’s legendary Corinth Canal

Adriatic, which separates Italy from the Balkans, and the Aegean sea, flowing between Turkey and Greece. These two stunning oceans have a distinctly different feel. The crystal clear but often cooler Adriatic is the northernmost arm of the Med and carries guests to stunning locations such as Montenegro and Croatia.

The Aegean, meanwhile, opens up a world of extraordinary Greek islands and Turkish ports where myths and legends abound, and intoxicating beaches promise days never to be forgotten. Much of Western culture is derived from the early civilisations of Crete and Greece, with the Aegean coastline dating back to around 4000BC.

Easy does it

So where to start? The good news for those who prefer not to fly is there’s an abundance of no-fly packages available, sailing from a dozen ports around the UK. With plans afoot for new cruise terminals and the market expanding its new-to-cruise offering, cruise lines are pushing the envelope in order to create itineraries suitable to the widest age group in cruising history.

Royal Caribbean’s new ship *Wonder of the Seas* is not only the world’s biggest, but is also targeting

the multi-generational market with activities for all the family. The line has totally redesigned its pool deck, the AquaTheatre promises edge-of-the-seat entertainment, and it also boasts the all-new Playscape, “an underwater world studded with slides, climbing walls and games, where imaginations can soar”.

Royal Caribbean International vice-president Europe, Middle East and Africa Ben Bouldin says: “At our ports of call we aim to offer a variety of Mediterranean onshore excursions through our partnerships with local providers, so there truly is something for everyone to enjoy. Thrill seekers looking for adventure can bike across the volcanic landscape of Mount Etna in Sicily, while foodie families can immerse themselves in the local culture by preparing tapas in Malaga. Our excursions are selected and designed to excite every kind of traveller.”

From the largest ships to some of the smallest. SeaDream Yacht Club has a very different focus. The newly renovated, luxurious twin yachts *SeaDream I* and *SeaDream II* can access new and interesting destinations that larger ships simply can’t visit. The line’s senior manager Adrienne D’Annunzio says: “We look for off-the-beaten paths, hidden gems – and we find them. Each year we sail the intimate yacht harbours of the Caribbean and Mediterranean, but always adding and changing where we go to keep it fresh and interesting.”

Taranto’s stunning Aragonese Castle, built by King Ferdinand in the 15th century



Guests can bike across Mount Etna's volcanic landscape or simply enjoy the view from afar

SeaDream has added several new small ports to its Mediterranean itineraries including Kiona and Folegandros in Greece and Crotone and Taranto in Italy. According to D'Annunzio, Taranto offers olive groves, a 15th century castle and so much more, while Crotone, located on Italy's Ionian coast, was founded by the Greeks around 710 BC.

Small-ship experts Emerald Cruises is offering a cruising experience unlike any other. The first ocean-going yacht cruise, *Emerald Azzurra*, was christened in Venice on 28 May 2022 and has been delivering the luxury super-yacht

SELLING TIPS

Unlike a Caribbean cruise, where cruisers have to get to grips with different local currencies, most countries in the Med use the Euro

• Instead of focusing on one destination, use the variety of the Mediterranean region to promote more extensive packages. It's easy for cruisers to visit three or four different countries in a week

• For the new-to-cruise market, suggest bigger ships from lines such as NCL, MSC Cruises and Royal Caribbean that operate out of Barcelona for that instant experience of being in the Med. Also suggest bookending a city break into the package

"Cruising the Med caters for all tastes, so every traveller can access their ideal holiday"

experience at affordable prices since. The custom-built yacht cruise is comprised of just 50 deluxe suites and staterooms, of which more than 80 per cent feature a balcony.

"There is very little in the Mediterranean cruising scene comparable to *Emerald Azzurra*," says David Winterton, Emerald's global director of brand & marketing. "Her compact size means that she carries a maximum of 100 guests per journey to ports and destinations only accessible to small yachts, whether that is docking by the terracotta walls of Rovinj's citadel in Croatia, or transiting the staggering Corinth Canal in Greece with inches to spare on either side. *Emerald Azzurra* offers a new and exclusive luxury sailing adventure for those wishing to soak up the sun and explore the beautiful coastlines of the Mediterranean."

Reflecting demand

In April this year, Celebrity Cruises revealed their newest ship *Celebrity Beyond*. In a marketplace of already stiff competition, *Beyond* aims to take the cruise industry into the next era of luxury. World famous chef Daniel Boulud launched his first restaurant at sea and Gwyneth Paltrow serves as wellbeing advisor. "*Celebrity Beyond* shatters any and every preconceived notion of the cruising experience," says Celebrity Cruises president and CEO Lisa Lutoff-Perlo. "This exquisite ship offers a journey at the intersection of elegance

and approachability filled with what's important to our guests today – forward-thinking design, culinary excellence, unparalleled wellbeing and incomparable service."

Celebrity Cruises is also expanding its Mediterranean offering. For the first time, at the end of 2023 *Celebrity Infinity* will be offering winter sailings for those looking to escape and enjoy the winter sun. There's a 10-night itinerary to Spain and Portugal and a wonderful cruise to Egypt and Israel, departing in February 2024.

"New itineraries definitely reflect the changing markets on cruise," says Not Just Travel's Alan Witt. "If you have a multi-generational family, some people will want to do the classic sightseeing, but there will be options of hop-on hop-off tours, mountain bike excursions, segway tours, and trips that you might do on a traditional beach holiday such as boat trips to smaller islands. The bigger ships are such a destination in themselves. Sea days are an easy sell when you have things like a go-kart track and a surf experience to keep the kids happy." 📌

ITINERARIES

Ambassador Cruise Line

• Ambassador Cruise Line is offering a 17-night Mediterranean no-fly cruise from Bristol on *Ambition*, including visits to Lisbon, Cadiz, Menorca, Corsica, Livorno, Rome and Gibraltar, departing 16 September 2023. Prices start from £1,419pp.
↳ ambassadorcruiseline.com

Celestyal Cruises

• Celestyal Crystal operates a Three Continents from Athens all-inclusive itinerary, visiting Egypt, Israel, Cyprus, the Greek island of Rhodes, and Turkey, departing 25 November 2023. Prices start from £779pp.
↳ celestyal.com

Emerald Cruises

• Emerald's 18-Day Discover Western Mediterranean & Morocco, on board *Azzurra*, embarks from Santa Cruz de Tenerife and sails to Arrecife, Casablanca, Gibraltar, Motril and Cartagena, among others. Departing on 17 April 2024, prices for this cruise start from £7,578pp.
↳ emeraldcruises.co.uk



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A cruise on *Marina* is the perfect choice for luxury travellers



The magical MARINA

On a memorable Baltic cruise,
Vicky Mayer gets a taste sensation on board
Oceania Cruises' luxurious *Marina*

Those who know me will agree that cooking is not one of my greatest skills, so imagine how I feel as I enter the splendid Culinary Centre on board Oceania Cruises' luxury small ship *Marina* for my first ever cookery lesson. In the cavernous room, resplendent with

Masterchef-style stainless steel benches and sea views, each guest is given an apron, an array of super sharp knives, a chopping board, their own gas cooker and plenty of space to cook.

My task? To recreate some of the best-loved dishes from one of Oceania's most famous restaurants, the Far East-inspired Red Ginger. Putting us through our paces is bubbly chef instructor Noelle Barille, who encourages us to gather around her bench to watch as she effortlessly cooks each dish before sending us back to our benches to give them a go.

Noelle is assisted by a team of lovely chefs from the ship's kitchen who work so very hard to help us chop the ingredients and clear off our benches between courses. So far so good, I think, as I begin chopping mini carrot batons for my spring rolls. The hour lesson speeds along in an instant as Noelle gives us some great tips, and we manage to whizz through three dishes. Despite my overcooked lobster pad thai, I leave bursting with pride at my not-so-awful efforts.

Not surprisingly, cooking lessons (at £89pp) are very popular and a great way of bringing the five-star cuisine of this luxury ship to life. Food often plays a major part when choosing any cruise, but Oceania Cruises really puts its neck out, with its tagline 'The Finest Cuisine at Sea', so on a five-night cruise, I am excited to see if their cuisine really passes the taste test.



The ship's sparkling Lalique Grand Staircase gives a taste of the on-board opulence



Polo Grill offers the finest beef dishes and seafood with a steakhouse feel



All accommodations are spacious with an elegant design and ample storage facilities



There's lots to see and do in colourful Copenhagen



Explore the narrow winding lanes and medieval architecture of Visby in Sweden

Pure class

With four speciality restaurants – Polo Grill, Toscana, Jacques and Red Ginger – to choose from at no extra charge, as well as the Grand Dining Room, a buffet lunch or dinner at the Terrace Café and the best coffee I've ever had on a ship at Horizons or Baristas, it's very difficult to find fault with what's on offer. On a whistle-stop trip along the Baltic, I look forward to enjoying some great meals and spending time on one of Oceania's best-loved ships.

My home from home for the cruise is a Penthouse suite on deck 11. Super roomy with a couch, writing desk and big balcony, it boasts walnut walls, dreamy blue and cream soft furnishings, a walk-in wardrobe and a glamorous

marble-clad bathroom with a great power shower and Asprey toiletries.

Even better, suite guests are given the services of a butler for the duration of their cruise who can help with reservations for the speciality restaurants, in-suite dining and any questions guests have about the facilities on board. What's more, complimentary afternoon tea and canapes can also be delivered to the room.

Yes, suite prices err on the pricey side, but the sheer luxury of space on any ship is always worth a lot and guests get plenty of bang for their buck. With a ship this luxurious, it would be easy to stay on board, enjoying the pleasure of laying in the sun on the pool deck, enjoying vodka martinis at the Horizons Bar, great entertainment at the Marina Lounge and of course, savouring delicious cuisine from dawn to dusk, but the Baltic beckons, and so I drag myself away from my suite.

Baltic life

The best-loved port stop on a Baltic cruise has always been St Petersburg but, until the war in Ukraine ends, Russian trips are off the cards. However, there's a lot more to the Baltics than Russia alone. Oceania Cruises offers plenty of itineraries for 2023 and I am lucky enough to sample five days of their popular 11-day Northern Realms cruise.

The voyage starts in Denmark's capital Copenhagen and speaking to a few of the passengers on board, it seems many of them arrive early to enjoy the city's best sights before boarding the ship. The port-rich cruise includes stops at some of the Baltic's most famous destinations, including Riga, Tallinn, Helsinki and Stockholm.

SELLING TIPS

While quality cuisine is a hallmark of a majority of cruises, with Oceania Cruises, it is truly part of its DNA and a fundamental element of what makes it unique

- Remind clients that the activities such as the hands-on cooking classes provide immersive experiences – more 'doing', less simply 'seeing'

- Suggest Oceania Cruises to luxury river cruise clients who could be tempted to give ocean cruising a try



Red Ginger's dramatic interior design matches its bold menu



Lounge chairs and day beds dotted around the pool allow guests to relax in comfort



Guests can enjoy a refreshing dip in the pool or unwind in one of the two whirlpool spas

“Cooking lessons are a great way of bringing the five-star cuisine of this luxury ship to life”

Dreaming of more

Before boarding *Marina*, many people I spoke to raved about Red Ginger and, now that I've had the pleasure of dining at this knock-out restaurant, I can safely say it does not disappoint. Decorated in dramatic black and red, the interior is as great as the menu and right from the start I know I'm in for a very memorable meal.

Guests start by choosing their chopsticks (from easy to hard) then it's an out-and-out assault on the taste buds. I start with salt and pepper calamari, which packed a real chilli punch, dive into my neighbour's tangy duck and watermelon starter then hit foodie heaven with the signature miso glazed seabass, delivered in its own mini banana leaf.

Given the choice, I could have eaten here every night but then, of course, ran the risk of missing out on the Polo Grill, where the steaks are exemplary, especially when accompanied by the totally decadent lobster mac and cheese or the moreish Osso Bucco Milanese.

On the day of my departure, as I savour my last great flat white and freshly baked croissant at Baristas, I look in envy at the lucky passengers enjoying more time on *Marina*, wondering how soon I can get on board again and whether eating at Red Ginger every night was ever allowed. 🍷

DETAILS

● The 12-day London to Copenhagen cruise on *Marina*, departing 11 July 2023, is priced from £2,789pp.

As well as the more familiar places, there are some more unusual port stops on the itinerary too, including Visby on Gotland Island in Sweden, Ronne on the island of Bornholm in Denmark and Klaipeda in Lithuania, and it's here where keen travellers can experience the real flavour of the area.

On a culinary adventure on Gotland, led by one of the senior chefs on the ship, guests can enjoy a trip to two leading organic farms to sample a Swedish farm-to-table experience. At Ejmunds Farm, the farmers humanely raise cattle to produce tender Kobe-like beef while at Lilla Bjers Farm, it's possible to learn about how they practise sustainable farming and enjoy a freshly prepared lunch of seasonal dishes in the greenhouse.

Another great excursion is the chance to walk around the cobbled streets of Ronne, the largest town on Bornholm. With its half-timbered colourful houses and lively market square, this bustling port stop gives visitors a real taste of a typical Baltic town made famous as a herring fishing port.

One of my bucket-list destinations has always been Riga, so my excitement reaches fever pitch as I step ashore and take in the Old Town – rightfully a UNESCO world heritage site since 1997. Though cobbled, the centre of this well-preserved city is easy to walk around, and features hit after hit of architectural gems. The Riga Cathedral and St Peter's Church are the standout sights of the tour as well as the chance to see many art nouveau designed buildings with their colourful motifs.

The last word

Princess Cruises vice-president UK and Europe
Eithne Williamson discusses her initial months in the role
and the exciting introduction of a new ship class

Time really does fly when you're having fun. It's been over four months now since I took on the position of vice-president for Princess Cruises UK and Europe, and to say I am loving my new role would be an understatement.

To be able to work with such an incredible team and a fantastic brand that is valued and respected by our travel agent partners is a privilege. Being at the helm of the UK and Europe team means that I oversee departments covering marketing, sales, commercial, and guest services. I love the steep learning curve this brings, and over the last few months I have been able to meet with our agent partners, listen in to our guest and agent calls and spend the day on board our ships in Southampton.

Speaking with our agent partners, feedback that I hear time and time again is how easy Princess is to do business with, and how wonderful our crew are. The extraordinary level of service our shipmates provide is testament to Princess Cruises and is something I am particularly proud of. The MedallionClass experience also helps our crew provide the personalised service of a small ship, while guests can still enjoy amenities only found on larger ships.

Ahead of the curve

The conversations I have had with agent partners have also reinforced the notion that there is strong demand to sail with Princess Cruises. Our ex-UK and fly-Med cruises have performed extremely well this year, achieving more than double the guest volume compared to 2019. Moreover, Princess had its best-ever booking day in June, with bookings up 13 per cent compared to our previous strongest booking day in 2019, thanks to the incredible support from travel agents.



"Our new Sphere-class ships will hold 4,300 guests"

For 2023, we are already ahead of plan for our ex-UK and fly-Med cruises, again delivering double the number of guests compared to the same time last year, and we are seeing increasing demand for voyages sailing further afield.

In particular, travel agents have expressed their delight for our new Vancouver to Alaska itineraries,

operating on *Crown Princess*, following requests for departures from this popular Canadian port.

Looking forward, plans are underway for more themed cruises in 2023, following the success of our themed voyages over the last two years. We will also have a brand-new class of ship joining the fleet in 2024 – a huge deal for Princess, as the last time we introduced a new class was in 2013.

Our new Sphere-class ships will hold 4,300 guests, providing even more opportunity for travel agents to introduce their customers to the Princess brand, as well as bring back those who have already sailed with us.

My first few months with Princess Cruises have been exciting, educational, and insightful. Coming into this role with fresh eyes, and building on what has already been achieved over recent years, I now look forward to expanding our relationships with agent partners and exploring new ways we can work together. 🌐



The Vancouver to Alaska itineraries on *Crown Princess* have been a hit with agents

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