

ISSUE 129 • SEPTEMBER 2024

THE VOICE OF THE CRUISE INDUSTRY

CRUISE

Trade News

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from the ground up

INSIDE: CTN INVESTIGATES IS THE MIDDLE EAST POISED FOR CRUISE DOMINATION? P41
INTERVIEW PONANT'S ANTHONY DANIELS, P46 • **REVIEW** HAL'S ROTTERDAM, P70

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WELCOME... TO THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE

While most of us spent the last eight weeks trying to escape the UK's unpredictable weather, one thing was certain: you wouldn't have caught the stars of our cover feature decamped on a sun-kissed beach with their out-of-offices on.

There's rarely a day off when you have a business to run, something the cruise agency owners featured in our long read on *page 48* can attest to. Nevertheless, each one managed to find time in their busy schedules to speak to *Cruise Trade News* as part of our in-depth feature on how to launch a successful travel enterprise. How did they get started? What do they know now that they wish they knew then? How long did it take to register their first 'win'? We get to the heart of it all.

For any of you sitting on a great business idea of your own, I urge you to read this article. Hopefully it inspires you to take a leap of faith.

It's been a busy summer for *Cruise Trade News*, too, with the team hard at work putting together a bumper September issue to help you end a record-breaking year on a high. On *page 18*, deputy editor Will Payne enlists the help of a bona fide NASA



ABOVE The awe-inspiring Norwegian fjords never disappoint

astronomer to investigate why star gazing cruises are more popular than ever. Meanwhile, on *page 70*, staff writer Lucy Abbott reports back from the breathtaking Norwegian Fjords as part of her review of Holland America Line's (HAL) new Pinnacle class ship.

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

Jack Carter
Editor

On the cover: Phil Couzens

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On the horizon...

Summer 2026 cruises land
on 17th October.



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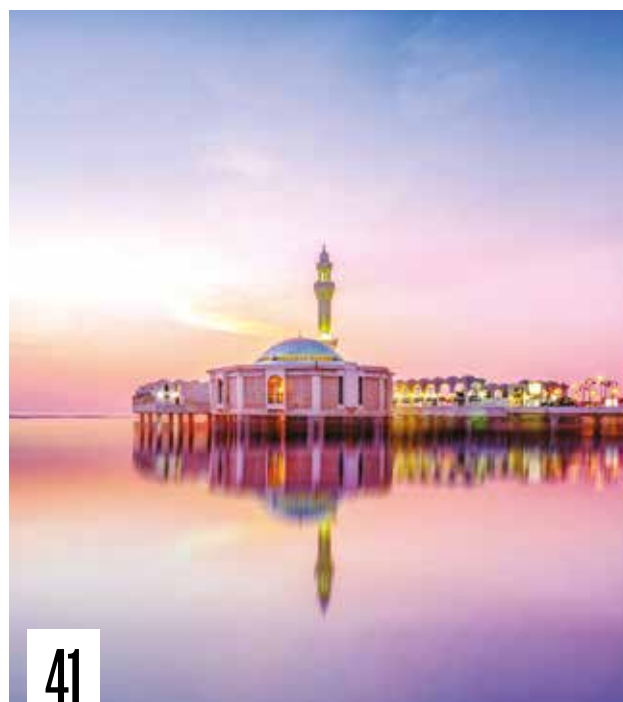
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Cruise Corner

CUNARD TO VISIT HUNDREDS OF AGENTS IN BIGGEST-EVER SALES BLITZ

> Cunard has announced plans to visit 250 travel agents across 70 stores in the UK as part of its biggest-ever nationwide sales blitz.

The sales team, joined by head office staff, will be armed with fresh updates, agent collateral and Shine reward points to give away. Tom Mahoney, director of UK sales at Cunard, said: "We are as committed as ever to supporting our travel agent community and working to create unforgettable experiences.

"These visits are a brilliant opportunity for Cunard to learn more about the issues impacting agents."



IN NUMBERS

250
agents

70
stores

16-20
September



'MILLIONAIRE' SELLERS JOIN SILVERSEA CRUISE

Fred Olsen Travel recently treated its top-selling agents to a four-night cruise on Silversea's new ship, *Silver Ray*, as a reward for each delivering more than £1 million of sales last year.

The eight "Millionaire Sellers" were Tanya Marshallsay, Sally Jones, Gayle Nicholls, Charlotte Robson, Mark Scrivener, Nigel Alexander, Madeleine Mayes and Annie Clougherty. They were joined by Fred Olsen Travel managing director

Steve Williams, director of retail Paul Hardwick and luxury cruise sales and project manager Natasha Lizardos.

The cruise travelled from Venice to Dubrovnik, with calls in Trieste, Zadar and Split, with all attendees staying in palatial suites. Each had time to enjoy a range of excursions and the luxury vessel's onboard features.

Hardwick said: "To see our top agents from across the country come together and celebrate their success was so gratifying."



GREECE LATEST TO IMPOSE CRUISE LEVY

Greece has become the latest holiday hotspot to announce plans to introduce a levy on cruise ship passengers. In September, prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said a €20 charge will be imposed on arrivals to the islands of Santorini and Mykonos during the summer.

Speaking at a press conference, Mitsotakis said excessive tourism was only a problem in a few destinations. "Some destinations have a significant issue during certain weeks or months of the year, which we need to deal with. Cruise shipping has burdened Santorini and Mykonos and this is why we are proceeding with these interventions."

In 2023, it is thought Greece generated €20 billion from its tourism industry on the back of nearly 31 million arrivals.

Cruise shipping has burdened Santorini and Mykonos



AMBASSADOR EXPANDS TRADE TEAM

Ambassador Cruise Line has strengthened its UK trade sales team with six new appointments as it looks to "meet the needs" of its agent partners.

The line has taken on four new business development executives (BDE), a trade support executive and a trade support assistant.

Each new addition to the team, which now totals 13, will have responsibility for fostering existing commercial relationships in their respective geographical or work areas to maximise sales opportunities for agents.

The new hires include Debbie Ballantyne, Natalie Hurst, Kelly Whitefoot, Jade Cheadle, Michelle Nairne and Audra Garner.



ROYAL BOSS TARGETS LAND OPERATORS

Royal Caribbean's senior sales director UK & Ireland

Aaron Langford believes the line is ready to challenge land-based operators following the success of *Utopia of the Seas* in the new-to-cruise market.

Speaking to *Cruise Trade News*, Langford revealed that the trade will be key to getting land-based holidaymakers on the Royal Caribbean fleet in 2025 and beyond.

"We are the pinnacle of what a cruise line is," Langford said. "From a UK perspective, it's moving from 2.2 million passengers toward 40 million holidaymakers. To put it into context, one point of share shift into that market equates to eight Oasis-class ships of passengers. If you start moving the needle, the rewards start to come pretty quick."

The line has already made strides toward competing in the land-based market following the launch of its latest Oasis-class ship, *Utopia of the Seas*, in Orlando last July. Langford said the ship's shorter three- and four-night itineraries have appealed to new-to-cruise customers, both in the UK market and overseas.

Head to head

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines' **Geoff Ridgeon** weighs up the value of a holiday at sea versus a getaway on land



It's a common debate among travellers: book a cruise or a land-based holiday? Everyone has their favourite holiday type, but which offers the best value? The destination is often the primary factor when it comes to booking a holiday, and cruising is the ideal way to visit multiple destinations at once. It also offers the chance to visit some of those trickier to reach places by air, such as the Azores.

With a land-based holiday, your customers are tied into one destination, which is ideal if they want to stay in one place; with a cruise, your customers can experience the joy of waking up in a new port of call almost daily.

For many customers, the next priority is accommodation. With a ship, there are many types of staterooms available, ranging from interior cabins to balcony suites, designed to suit all budgets, and there is the added benefit of being able to pick a specific cabin. When you book accommodation on land, customers can stay in the heart of their chosen destination, but there is not the same level of flexibility when it comes to location or room number.

Another benefit of choosing a UK cruise departure is that on arrival at the terminal, customers' luggage is taken by an army of friendly attendants not to be seen again until they're in their cabin. Cruise ships also have all the benefits of a luxury hotel with swimming



ABOVE Cruising offers the chance to visit hard-to-reach destinations

“Cruise ships have all the benefits of a luxury hotel with entertainment, pools, spas and multiple dining options

TOP TIPS

1 Cruising offers the chance to visit some destinations that are trickier to reach by air, such as the Azores.

2 Guests can experience the joy of waking up in a new port of call almost daily while on a cruise.

3 Cruise-goers have the advantage of choosing the perfect cabin for their holiday requirements.

pools, spas, entertainment and multiple delicious dining options, all in one place.

Fred. Olsen prides itself on providing guests with personal, attentive service and helping to make unforgettable memories. We want our guests to get the most out of their cruise experience, which is why our itineraries are designed to celebrate local culture, cuisine and enriching shore excursions. That could be by visiting an orchard in Norway and tasting apple juice or cider during the autumn fruit harvest, learning how to make Pasteis de nata in Lisbon or uncovering Roman Cartagena with a local archaeologist.

There really is a cruise itinerary for everyone and we firmly believe that cruising is a clear winner when it comes to the best way to see the wonders of the world. ●



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NEED TO KNOW

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



CRUISING CROATIA

Unforgettable Croatia welcomed 13 travel agents from the UK and the US on its inaugural fam trip on 5 August. Along with plus ones, the group sailed with the luxury small-ship operator on a four-night Dalmatian Coast itinerary on the 38-guest *Memories*. The cruise featured guided tours of Split and Dubrovnik, as well as a visit to Hvar Island for a wine-tasting experience. The trip included flights, breakfast and lunch daily, a welcome dinner and captain's dinner, all excursions, private transfers and Wi-Fi.



CRYSTAL STRENGTHENS BOOKING PROCESS

Crystal has launched a new online engine in a bid to streamline the booking process for its travel agent partners in the UK. The integrated platform went live on 1 August and offers a “suite of resources designed to provide the trade with the flexibility, speed and reliability they need to serve their clients”, the line said.

It features an “easy-to-navigate” design which simplifies the search

and booking process, while offering real-time availability, personalised recommendations, enhanced support for the trade and exclusive promotions.

“Travel advisors are at the heart of our business, and we are committed to providing them with the best tools and resources available,” said Marett Taylor, chief sales officer of Crystal parent company A&K Travel Group.



Agent ‘stunned’ by F1 experience

A travel agent has thanked Regent Seven Seas Cruises for helping her and her husband create “long lasting memories” during an Aston Martin Aramco Formula One Team experience.

Cate Rizzo from Iglu Cruise and her husband joined Regent’s vice president of sales UK Paul Beale for the VIP event which took place at Silverstone from 5-7 July. It comes after Rizzo was named the winner of the trade incentive launched by the luxury line when it partnered with the Formula One team earlier this year.



NASH NAMED EXPLORA PRESIDENT

Anna Nash has joined Explora Journeys as president of the luxury cruise brand of the MSC Group. Reporting directly to Pierfrancesco Vago, executive chair of MSC Group’s Cruise Division, Nash will bolster the company’s senior leadership team following a career in the luxury cruise and travel market spanning two decades.

Most recently, she served as chief commercial officer at Aman, where she helped shape the company’s global commercial strategies and brand expansion. During her ten-year stint with the firm, she also held the position of chief marketing officer and chief communications officer.

Nash said: “I am incredibly proud to join Explora Journeys.”

NEED TO KNOW



MEDITERRANEAN MEMORIES

AE Expeditions will offer voyages to the Mediterranean, Southeast Asia and the Atlantic Coast for the first time ever in 2026. The brand's Arctic and Beyond season features 42 departures, including expedition voyages to Indonesia and Borneo, solar eclipse sailings from Greenland and new Arctic combinations. The portfolio also introduces small ship cruise itineraries visiting the Mediterranean, Atlantic Coast, British Isles and Ireland, which will run alongside the company's core offering of polar and remote area expeditions.



PONANT ENTERS INDONESIA

Ponant has partnered with South Sea pearling company, Paspaley, to launch a 30-guest expedition in Australia and Indonesia. The 10-day itinerary will sail year-round on a new boutique motor yacht named *Paspaley Pearl* in Australia's Kimberley River, East Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, with the first sailing departing 10 January 2025.

Guests will be able to explore the hidden corners of the Asia Pacific region, including the untrammelled routes pioneered by renowned pearler and founder of Paspaley, Nicholas Paspaley AC, and his crew in the 1970s. Travelling from East Timor to Bali, the newly refitted yacht will be the only boutique expedition vessel in the Kimberley with private balconies.



In the spotlight

A survey of 900 travellers revealed the Northern Lights is the most sought-after natural wonder for guests.

The study, conducted by Cruise.co.uk, asked travellers which wonders they would most like to experience while on a cruise. Taking top spot with 33 per cent of the vote was the Aurora Borealis, which dazzled the UK with a rare appearance in May. You can read more about the rise of astronomy-themed cruises on [page 18](#).

Elsewhere, 29 per cent of respondents said they most wanted to spot whales and other marine wildlife.



HX RAPPED BY ADVERTISING WATCHDOG

HX has been pulled by the UK advertising watchdog for a "misleading" sustainability claim.

The fly-cruise ad, which read "Since 1896, we've been the leaders in sustainable expeditions", was said by the complainant to have given a misleading impression of the expeditions' environmental impact. In response, HX said an

average consumer would not have understood the claim "sustainable expeditions" as including flights, with the word "expedition" having much stronger associations with travel by land or sea.

The Advertising Standards Agency (ASA) concluded the advert must not appear again in the form that was complained of.



SPOILT FOR CHOICE

Help your customers broaden their horizons and discover the far reaches of the globe in 2025 with Norwegian Cruise Line, writes **Will Payne**

With a near 60-year history in breaking the boundaries of traditional

cruising, your customers are certain to make long-lasting memories on a trip with Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL®).

The line's fleet of 20 contemporary ships, which include the new *Norwegian Viva*® and coming next year *Norwegian Aqua*, are open for sale now with holiday options for more than 400 of the world's most desirable destinations.

As well as headline favourites such as Barcelona, New York and Walvis Bay, the cruise specialist also offers itineraries to Great Stirrup Cay, its private island destination in the Bahamas, Curaçao and Dakar in Senegal.

Onboard, guests will have a hard time choosing where to eat with

up to 21 diverse dining options – like showstopping Japanese in Teppanyaki or high end French cuisine at Le Bistro – on a single ship.

EUROPEAN ADVENTURES

Next year the line will offer myriad itineraries, including a 12-day Northern Europe: Iceland, Norway & Svalbard from Copenhagen itinerary onboard *Norwegian Star*®.

Customers looking for breathtaking scenery should set their sights on Måløy in Norway. The town is home to Jostedalsglacier National Park, where guests can discover continental Europe's largest glacier.

After a day of exploration, guests can reach true relaxation onboard *Norwegian Star* with a hot stone massage in the Mandara Spa®. After, they can tuck into fresh, rustic fare in Italian

restaurant La Cucina, or choose from a wide range of premium, succulent cuts in Cagney's Steakhouse.

In the Mediterranean, meanwhile, remind customers to come equipped with a camera to snap pictures of dramatic coastal cliffs in Ibiza's Parc Natural de Ses Salines.

They can then head to Beachouse Ibiza for a plate of seabass tartare with crispy seaweed crackers and Mediterranean citrus, rounding off the perfect sun-kissed adventure.

AMAZING AFRICA

Further afield, on an 18-day Africa: Namibia, Cape Verde, Angola & Ivory Coast itinerary from Cape Town to Lisbon aboard *Norwegian Dawn*®, customers will have the chance to get under the skin of some of the world's most captivating countries.



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Nassua; Norwegian Dawn in Cape Town; New York

For example, in Senegal's Dakar, they can visit gleaming mosques and cathedrals before browsing the colourful stalls of one of the many bustling markets for handmade goods and jewellery, which local artists craft from horn, mud, gourds and seashells.

They can then join a tour of Place de l'Indépendance and see the colonial architecture of historic buildings lining the central square.

Back onboard, guests can drop by The Cellars, a Michael Mondavi Family Wine Bar, for a wine tasting, or take lady luck for a spin in the expansive casino.

Following a good night's sleep, guests will wake up to Banjul in Gambia to take in the sweeping landscapes before tucking into a plate of *benachin* – a delicacy of rice cooked with meat or fish, alongside locally sourced vegetables and tomatoes.

CARIBBEAN DREAMS

Across the Atlantic, guests can immerse themselves in the crystal-clear waters of

“White sand and cobalt blue water clash to create an image akin to a Hollywood movie

the Caribbean on an 11-day Caribbean: Curaçao, Aruba and Dominican Republic itinerary, round-trip from Miami onboard *Norwegian Gem*®.

In Oranjestad, snow-white sands and cobalt blue waters clash to create an image akin to those in Hollywood movies. The Aruban capital also plays host to the 18th-century Fort Zoutman and the Willem III Tower, which houses the island's Historical Museum.

After a day of informative exploration, guests can visit *Norwegian Gem*'s onboard Starbucks® for a pick-me-up before they enjoy live entertainment in the Sugarcane Mojito Bar. Having been refurbished in 2022, the ship blends the rich heritage of traditional cruising with modern amenities.

But the adventure doesn't stop there. In Curaçao, guests will have the chance to discover a magical underwater universe, brimming with vibrant coral and marine life, such as reef sharks, moray eels and octopus.

Wherever and however your customers intend to travel next year, NCL's impressive array of itineraries shouldn't be overlooked. ●



Discover the world

A selection of NCL's standout itineraries

● An 18-night Africa cruise aboard *Norwegian Dawn* from Cape Town to Lisbon via Walvis Bay, Luanda, São Tomé, Abidjan (Côte D'Ivoire), Banjul, Dakar, Santa Maria and Tenerife. Prices start from £2,119pp.

● An eight-night Bahamas cruise aboard *Norwegian Escape*® round-trip from New York via Orlando, Nassau and Great Stirrup Cay. Prices start from £755pp.

● A nine-night Mediterranean cruise aboard *Norwegian Breakaway*® round-trip from Barcelona via Cannes, Florence (Livorno), Rome (Civitavecchia), Naples, Cagliari, Ibiza and Palma. Prices start from £979pp.



Terms and conditions apply to all offers, see norwegiancentral.com for details.

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STAR POWER

Astral phenomena dominating the night sky in recent months has inspired cruise lines to release a raft of new itineraries. **Will Payne** reveals how agents can utilise these cosmic anomalies

Meteor showers, the Northern Lights, solar eclipses – the very definition of “you had to be there” moments. And what better place to witness these cosmic events than out at sea where light pollution and masses of people can’t spoil the show.

So far this year the UK has been treated to several stargazing showpieces, including the Perseid Meteor shower in August, a partial solar eclipse in April and a rare sighting of the Aurora Borealis a month later. Cruise lines have since capitalised on these events by releasing a range of new itineraries designed to get customers closer than ever to these celestial experiences. Paul Maley of the NASA Johnson Space Center Astronomical Society says witnessing an astral phenomenon is an unforgettable moment.

“Even though I have seen these phenomena many times, each experience feels like the first, since no-two visual appearances are identical,” Maley tells *Cruise Trade News*. “It is gratifying to see a first-time observer scream with delight or amazement.”

Maley urges travellers not to hesitate when it comes to booking a cruise to see one of these amazing occurrences. “Being at sea gets you away from the crowds,” he advises. “At sea you also have

much better mobility, which means you can keep far from the clouds.”

When asked if there are any more phenomena we should be keeping an eye out for over the next few years, Maley says the impending explosion of the recurrent nova T Coronae Borealis will make the otherwise impossible-to-see star visible for a few days, before it fades for another 80 years. In August 2027, meanwhile, a total solar eclipse will be visible above the Mediterranean Sea, which Maley says will be the longest occurrence of its kind for “the rest of our lives”.

SAILING TO THE STARS

Virgin Voyages is just one of the cruise lines capitalising on these events. Earlier this year, the company launched its first-ever Eclipse Voyages as part of its Marvelous Voyages series, which, from August 2026, will give travellers an opportunity to

“
What better place to witness cosmic events than at sea where light pollution can’t spoil the show





cruise towards the path of totality on 12- and 15-night itineraries. To make the occasion even sweeter, the line will roll out new culinary creations – like Milky Way milkshakes – while erecting grandstands, outfitted with telescopes and binoculars.

Michelle Bentubo, chief operating officer for Virgin Voyages, said the line's customers are “actively looking” for more enriching experiences. “It’s clear that with astrotourism on the rise and the path of totality for the 2026 eclipse primarily over the ocean, cruising is an ideal way for our sailors [customers] to witness the rare phenomenon,” she says. “Fans of our brand are always asking us to give them more aspiring experiences. We’re being intentional about our itineraries and deployments and planning them further out.”

Holland America Line (HAL), meanwhile, unveiled six new sailings ranging from 13 to 35 days to enable guests to witness extraordinary astro events, such as the solar eclipse, the Aurora and summer solstice in the Arctic. Guests on solar eclipse cruises can learn more about the cosmos during onboard lectures from

“Guests can learn more about the cosmos during onboard lectures from scientific experts

scientific experts, who they can later meet in person.

“[These experiences] are perfect for guests who want a holiday that inspires and enriches their lives,” says Karen Farndell, director of sales and marketing for HAL. “We’ve also structured the sailings to offer as much variation as possible.”

Farndell urges agents to highlight to clients the unique nature of witnessing a solar eclipse or summer solstice while sailing.

Elsewhere, Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) has highlighted “astrotourism” as a trend which continues to gather momentum in 2024. According to research from National Geographic, somewhere between one

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Paul Maley searching for the stars; cosmic events have inspired new sailings; Holland America Line’s Karen Farndell



ABOVE Brits were treated to a rare sighting of the Aurora Borealis earlier this year

“ Travelling to destinations specifically to stargaze has been gaining momentum over the past decade

and four million people travelled to see the solar eclipse, which took place in April of this year.

“Travelling to destinations specifically to stargaze has been gaining momentum over the past decade and it’s a bucket list activity we can help people with,” says Gary Anslow, vice president of sales in the UK and Ireland for NCL.

Carnival Cruise Line, P&O Cruises, Scenic Luxury Cruises and Tours and Windstar Cruises are just a few of the other lines jumping on this trend. Earlier this year, guests aboard Swan Hellenic’s *SH Diana* in the Gulf of California were plunged into darkness for four minutes and 25 seconds during the longest total solar eclipse in recent years. One of those guests was Maley, who described the eclipse as the “longest and most awesome” of the 84 he’s experienced. “Seeing it from the sea put it in a class of its own.”

TRADE OPPORTUNITY

The rise in the number of event-based cruise itineraries in recent months comes down to travellers looking to broaden their horizons in a post-pandemic world. After Covid-19, the industry saw

Cosmic cruises

Total solar eclipse

P&O Cruises

The 14-night Spain and Portugal cruise aboard *Ventura*, round-trip from Southampton via Santander, Gijon, El Ferrol, Madeira, Lisbon and Vigo, departs 8 August 2026, from £1,449pp.

Northern Lights

Cunard

The 13-night Norway and Northern Lights cruise aboard *Queen Victoria*, round-trip from Southampton via Andalsnes, Tromsø, Narvik, Alesund and Stavanger, departs 22 March 2026, from £1,449pp.

Summer Solstice

Holland America Line

The 13-night Arctic Circle Crossing: North Cape Solstice cruise aboard *Nieuw Statendam*, round-trip from Dover or Rotterdam, via Eidfjord, Maløy, Trondheim, Leknes, Tromsø, Honningsvåg and Lerwick, departs 13 June 2026. Prices including the ‘Have it All’ package start from £3,069pp.

an uptick in holidaymakers looking to book bucket-list trips to places like Australia, South America and the Southeast Asia, having not been able to travel properly for such a long time.

But after spending a few years ticking off their wish lists, customers are now looking to go one step further and pair their holiday with a once-in-a-lifetime event – whether that be a solar eclipse, a Formula One Grand Prix or a must-see concert. In turn, this presents agents with an opportunity to convert non-cruisers into holiday-at-sea-lovers by offering them an itinerary coupled with an event they would otherwise struggle to witness if they weren’t on open waters. ●

Sail into Savings of up to 15% on select 2024-2026 cruises and expeditions

Your clients may enjoy extraordinary destinations, authentic experiences, personalised service, and fine dining on board Seabourn's intimate ships, with their private, yacht-like atmosphere.

They may sail on hand-crafted cruises to hidden harbours and off-the-beaten-path ports in the Mediterranean, Northern Europe, Alaska, and beyond. Or embark on an expedition to the Arctic, South Pacific of Australia's Kimberley, connecting with the incredible wildlife, landscapes, and cultures that make these regions so special.

On board their ultra-luxury home at sea, they'll delight in unique and personal 'Seabourn Moments' they'll cherish forever, moments that stay with our guests long after their voyage ends.



Here are just a few offers:

7-Day Greece & Dalmatian Delights
22 Jun; 3* Aug; 5 Oct 2025
SEABOURN ENCORE
Piraeus (Athens) to Fusina (Venice)
Cruise from: was £3,599pp
NOW £3,299*pp | Inclusive Air
VISITS: Monemvasia (Greece); Katakolon (Olympia);
Dubrovnik (Croatia); Hvar; Rovinj
*Lead fare based on 3/8/24

13-Day Spectacular Svalbard & Greenland Expedition
18 May 2025 | SEABOURN VENTURE
Reykjavik to Edinburgh
Cruise from: was £10,999pp
NOW £9,899pp | Fly/cruise please ask
VISITS: Flatey (Iceland); Akureyri; Jan Mayen Island
(Norway); Exploring East Greenland Ice Edge;
5-day Svalbard Experience; Longyearbyen.
→ Charter flight to Edinburgh.
• 5-day Svalbard Experience

14-Day Exotic Caribbean in Depth
4, 18* Jan; 15 Feb; 1 Mar 2025
SEABOURN OVATION
Roundtrip Barbados
Cruise from: was £6,299pp
NOW £5,699pp | Fly/cruise please ask
VISITS: Rodney Bay (St Lucia); Castries; Terre-de-Haut
(Iles des Saintes); St Johns Antigua; Jost van Dyke;
Carambola Beach^ (St Kitts & Nevis); Philipsburg
(St Maarten); Sopers Hole (Frenchmans Cay);
Carambola Beach^; Fort-de-France (Martinique);
Port Elizabeth (Bequia); St Georges (Grenada).
• ^Seabourn's Caviar on the Surf Beach Party
*Lead fare based on 18/1/25 ^ weather permitting

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- Intimate ships with a private yacht-like atmosphere.
- Intuitive, personalised service provided by team passionate about exceeding guests expectations.
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- Tipping is neither required, nor expected.
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- World-class dining and culinary experiences that rival the finest restaurants anywhere, all complimentary guests dine where, and with whom they wish.

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'Sail into Savings' applies to select 2024-2026 itineraries. Terms and conditions apply.

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Celebrate Poseidon's Anniversary!

Incredible Savings and Complimentary Swarovski Optik Binoculars

This year marks a significant milestone for Poseidon Expeditions: 25 years of polar cruising!

For a quarter of a century, we've been sharing our passion for Arctic and Antarctic adventures, helping travelers from around the world fulfill their once-in-a-lifetime travel dreams. To honor this special occasion, we've prepared an exceptional treat for our travelers.

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To enhance the experience for our guests, the first 50 adult travelers who book an Arctic cruise with our anniversary special will receive complimentary Swarovski Optik CL Companion 10x30 binoculars. For those traveling on our select Antarctic cruises, we offer a complimentary gear rental package including waterproof pants, mittens, a backpack, and hiking sticks.

Join our epic cruises, take advantage of these exclusive deals and special gifts, and experience the magic of traveling with Poseidon Expeditions!



Tech Talk

The future's bright

After steady growth over the past two years, 2024 is proving to be a remarkable year for cruise, says Traveltek's Cressida Sergeant

In 2023, the cruise industry finally began to show signs of recovery, leaving behind three excruciating years. Even despite the growing optimism, no one could have predicted how strongly the industry would perform in 2024, with the first half of the year showing higher booking numbers than all of 2023 combined. From January to June 2024, bookings on the Traveltek platform tripled the total of 2019. What's also interesting is that a new demographic shift may be underway in the market.

One of the best indicators of this has been the growing interest of lines like Virgin Voyages, which offers adult-only cruises that are very much geared towards a different kind of voyager. While the average age of the line's guests is 48 to 49 (the same average age we have seen across all cruise bookings on our platform), Virgin has been quoted many times stating that their target demographic is the "young at heart" who are looking for something different. This has proven to be a successful marketing strategy as Virgin Voyages' *Resilient Lady* has now ascended into the top 10 ships booked in 2024 despite only making her debut in May 2023. The success of Virgin Voyages is also indicative of a broader trend where more new-to-cruise passengers are entering the market, which is fabulous to see.

Another surprising trend in Traveltek's booking data is how, despite broader economic challenges like the cost of living crisis, the UK's cruise industry has demonstrated resilience. The



“Despite broader economic challenges, the cruise industry has shown resilience

average price of a cruise booked in the UK decreased from £2,890 in 2019 to £2,520 in 2023. The average price of cruises booked in 2024 has risen slightly to £2,690. This fluctuation highlights a complex interplay of factors. In other words, this is great for agents when the cruise product still demands a higher-than-average sales price, but could this drop indicate that a pricing war may be on the way?

October is usually when cruise bookings start to pick up once more, so we're looking forward to seeing what new shifts and trends will occur as we look to round out a successful 2024. ●

ABOVE Cressida Sergeant says the cruise industry has surpassed all expectations in 2024 after a year of recovery in 2023

In NUMBERS

48

The average age of all bookings on the TravelTek platform

£2,690

The average price of a cruise in 2024, down from £2,890 in 2019

£2,520

The average price of a cruise in 2023 when the cruise industry was still in recovery

A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

With summer behind us, now's the time to get your clients dreaming of their next cruise adventure, courtesy of Virgin Voyages

As the cooler nights set in and long spells of pleasant sunshine slowly make way for blustery afternoons, the signs that summer has been and gone are sadly inescapable. The good news is that now's the perfect time to get travellers excited about their 2025 cruise holidays and no one understands this better than Virgin Voyages.

Indeed, the adults-only line is offering a host of incentives to help get passengers back on-board next year. Clients who book now can benefit from a 70 per cent discount on second passengers across all voyages. Furthermore, those who book a new 2025 voyage will receive a free Bar Tab of up to \$300 worth of premium drinks.

This promotion includes sailings on new Mediterranean and European itineraries to Istanbul, Morocco, Dublin, and Scandinavia, *Brilliant Lady's* debut voyages in North America, limited 11- to 16-night transatlantic and repositioning one-way trips, and new Caribbean sailings this winter.

Virgin's dedication to providing guests holidays to remember is also reflected in the variety of rewards and incentives currently on offer to its UK trade partners. In September, for example, agents who log a 2025 Mediterranean or Northern Europe booking on the brand's trade reward platform FirstMateLoot.co.uk will earn a cash payout of £25.

Furthermore, the line's "Make Me A MerMillionaire" trade incentive programme, in partnership with Virgin Red, will see one agent

“

The more bookings an agent makes, the more chances they'll have to win



reel in one million Virgin Points with a share of a further million up for grabs for prize winners. To enter, agents simply need to make a 2025 Europe-departing Virgin Voyages booking and log their sales on the brand's trade reward platform. The more bookings they make, the more chances they'll have to win.

SHORESIDE ADVENTURES

Next year's itineraries are set to include a host of all-new experiences for the line, including the chance to delve into the rich history of Istanbul, where its Old City shines a light on cultural influences of the many empires that once ruled there. Guests can also visit Garden Mezze for an Ali Nazik Kebab, made up of hand-chopped beef and lamb marinated in olive oil, yogurt and spices grilled on a skewer, with a bed of charcoal-roasted eggplant with garlic butter sauce.

Meanwhile, travellers will have the opportunity to take in the sights, sounds and smells of Seattle during one of *Brilliant Lady's* new sailings to North





Did you know?

Virgin Voyages' first fleet is known as the Lady Ships, a play on the term "your ladyship", giving a nod to Virgin's British heritage.

America. Known for its rugged islands, evergreen national forests and, of course, its exceptional coffee culture, the Emerald City is the ideal location for travellers who are eager to imbibe the US' inimitable west coast.

Here, guests can spend shore days sampling fresh seafood and local produce in the urban markets or working their way through the delicious espresso varieties at the original Starbucks. Other must-sees for cruise-goers are the city's iconic Space Needle, which offers 360° views of the city and its outer reaches, and the Chihuly Garden and Glass centre, where artistic glassblowing meets stunning horticultural marvels.

TAILORED CRUISING

Onboard, the line offers award-winning specialty dining including The Wake, where guests can feast on succulent hanger steak, followed by zesty lemon cheesecake. There's also The Dock, which offers mezze-style bites and glasses of rosé on its outdoor terrace – perfect for a sail away tipple.

Virgin's itineraries and onboard offerings are always curated with adults in mind, from the boutique shops and lively bars and nightclubs to well-equipped fitness facilities and diverse entertainment options. Additionally, travellers won't be stung by hidden costs further down the line. Each Virgin Voyages cruise offers Always Included Luxury, which provides more than \$1,000 of value with the standard fare.

Three unmissable Virgin Voyages itineraries for 2025

1 A four-night Fire & Sunset Soirées cruise aboard *Valiant Lady*, round-trip from Miami via Key West and Beach Club at Bimini, departs 5 February 2025, from £744pp.

2 An eight-night Barcelona to France, Italy & Greece cruise aboard *Resilient Lady*, from Barcelona to Piraeus (Athens) via Cannes, Civitavecchia (Rome), Valletta and Mykonos, departs 26 April 2025, from £2,136.69 per cabin.

3 A six-night English Sights & European Delights cruise aboard *Scarlet Lady*, round-trip from Portsmouth via La Coruna, Bilbao and Le Verdon (Bordeaux), from £2,099.38 per cabin.

This includes the 20+ eateries with menus curated by Michelin star chefs, group fitness classes, Wi-Fi, gratuities, entertainment and a soda and drinks package for no extra charge. Agents can also enjoy the line's Brilliant For You benefits, including 16 per cent commission on voyage fare and 10 per cent on bookables like Bar Tab and the line's excursion programme Shore Things.

PROOF IN THE PUDDING

Since its launch the line has earned a 95 per cent satisfaction score with a 40 per cent on board rebooking rate. Award-winning support teams are also on hand to provide exceptional service to your customers before, during and after their holiday.

Vibrant, sun-drenched days, sunset-filled late stays and starry overnights in captivating destinations like Ibiza, Mykonos, San Juan and beyond give customers the opportunity to get to know the real people and real experiences that make each destination so special. 🍷

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

Customers can delve into Istanbul's rich history; Katerinas restaurant in Mykonos is highly recommended





**Brilliant
For You**

Make Their Holidays Extra Special With Our September Offer

There's nothing better than sending your Sailors on sailings to jaw-dropping destinations! That's why right now when you book your Sailors on a 2025 cruise with Virgin Voyages, they'll get 70% off on their second Sailor and up to \$300 in onboard drinks - on us. They will make memories on the Mediterranean with one of our irresistible itineraries leaving out of Barcelona, Athens or Rome, or explore a little closer to home with voyages leaving from Portsmouth and heading for Amsterdam, Zeebrugge (Bruges), Bordeaux, Reykjavik, and more.

Lifelong memories come easy when they're at sea, and with our incredible 70% off second Sailor offer, they can do it all for less in 2025. As always, while they enjoy even more luxurious sailing, you'll earn 16% on their voyage fare and 10% on all pre-voyage bookables.



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Hebridean Island Cruises

Having launched a new online agent training platform in July, the luxury Scottish operator is ready to strengthen its ties with the trade

IN THE KNOW

According to Cruise Britain, 2023 was a record year for domestic cruising, with some 2.2 million day call passengers choosing to explore the UK by cruise ship. It's no surprise, then, to see lines like Hebridean Island Cruises reporting strong growth, with the luxury Scottish operator welcoming roughly 3,000 passengers onto its three intimate boutique vessels last year.

Having launched in 1989, the all-inclusive line operates some of the smallest luxury ships in the Hebrides, allowing it to reach islands, bays and lochs that are totally out of reach to larger vessels. Homeporting in Oban, often referred to as the seafood capital of Scotland, grants its ships easy access to the Caledonian Canal and the stunning Outer Hebrides, including Britain's most westerly point – the remote island archipelago of St Kilda.



THE FLEET

Hebridean's trio of ships are intimate in size, accommodating up to 48 guests while offering a warm, congenial atmosphere akin to the cosy country homes scattered throughout the region. Hebridean's all-inclusive offering comprises all meals, as well as

champagne, wine, beer and soft drinks; shore excursions, including entrance fees; bike hire and fishing equipment; and gratuities.

Gala dinners are often a highlight of any Hebridean cruise, which start with cocktail receptions hosted in the oak-clad Tiree Lounge. Dinner is served in the Columba Restaurant and includes a recital of Robert Burns' famous 'Address to a Haggis!' poem. Guests can also book a spot on an exclusive Hebridean picnic, prepared ashore by the ship's head chef.

GOING BEYOND

Being able to sail deep into the Hebrides is one of the line's major selling points. In fact, some of the islands are so far off the beaten track that the only way to access them is via special beach landing craft, which enable guests to set foot on inhabited islands. Shore excursions



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT
Speedboat rides are included in the price; there's lots of space outside to relax and enjoy the view; newly converted boutique ship *Lord of the Highlands* is the latest addition; *Lord of the Highlands*' panoramic lounge is created with comfort in mind

“THE LINE'S SHIPS OFFER A WARM, CONGENIAL ATMOSPHERE

include visits to private castles, made possible thanks to the line's long-standing ties with local communities, and there's plenty of opportunity to sample seafood at source, too.

WHO'S WHO?

Hannah Cockell, key account & business development manager, is responsible

for Hebridean's brand awareness across all travel trade markets and is the main contact for trade enquiries relating to promotion and marketing collateral.

WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON?

The luxury operator recently launched a new cruise training platform to help bolster its relationship with the UK travel trade. The training platform, hosted by OTT (Online Travel Training), consists of five courses relating to the company's three vessels and the destinations they visit, helping trade pitch the right experience to the right client.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Hannah Cockell, business development and key account manager, explains why now's the perfect time to pitch Scotland to your clients

Are cruises to the Hebridean Islands becoming more popular?

We were one of the first cruise ships to explore these beautiful areas and it's clear popularity is growing as so many other vessels are now offering cruises in Scotland. However, we're the experts. Our ships were purpose built for The Western Isles and Caledonian Canal; they're the smallest afloat and they can get into the secluded lochs and bays.

Is there anything on the horizon agents should know about?

We've recently launched our new agent training platform, and anyone completing the course will be entered into a prize draw to win a Hebridean cruise. We are committing to events to help build brand awareness by speaking directly to as many agents as we can. We're also hoping to invite more agents on board to experience our ships first hand.

TOP TIPS

1 Hebridean Island Cruises' three ships homeport in Oban, where guests can find spectacular seafood, as well as rich Highland history and a wealth of outdoor activities, making it a great option for a pre- or post-cruise add-on.

2 As well as sailing down the breathtaking Caledonian Canal and the stunning Outer Hebrides, in 2025 *Hebridean Princess* will venture to the south coast of England, the Channel Islands and Northern France.

3 With a high crew-to-guest ratio, staff quickly get to know passengers, adding to the convivial atmosphere. And with meals, gratuities and activities included in the price, guests needn't worry about a thing once onboard.

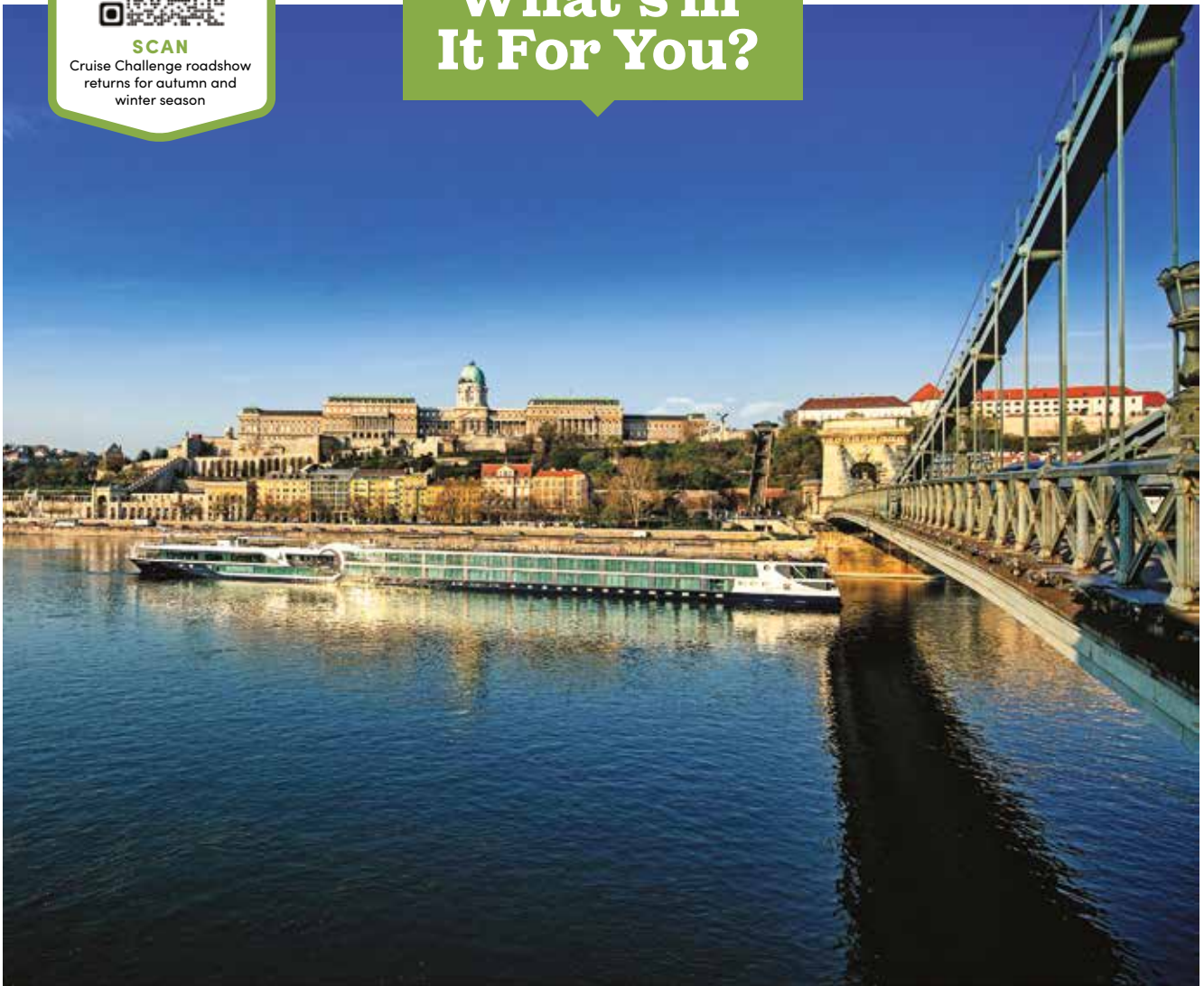


SCAN

Cruise Challenge roadshow
returns for autumn and
winter season

INCENTIVES
SPECIAL OFFERS
ITINERARIES

What's in It For You?



AVALON DETAILS AGENT FAM TRIP PROGRAMME



Avalon Waterways will look to bolster its ties with UK agents following the launch of its first fam trip programme since 2020. Starting in October, the new scheme will see agents hosted by a member of the line's UK sales team on three- or four-night sailings on the Danube.

Phil Shipman, UK sales director for Avalon Waterways, said: "It's great to restart the agent fam trip programme and we can't wait to host agents onboard. We know how stand out our product is and we are looking forward to agents being able to experience it for themselves.

"Agents are integral to everything we do at Avalon Waterways and the reintroduction of fam trips is a natural step for us as we continue to build our new and existing relationships."

The tours will give agents the chance to view the Avalon Panorama Suites, which are thirty per cent larger than the industry standard and are thought to offer river cruising's only open-air balcony.

Avalon Waterways' river cruises include full-board dining, complimentary regional wine or beer at mealtimes, as well as soft drinks, and a happy hour every day.

Visit

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



AMAWATERWAYS BRINGS BACK 'SELL FIVE, SAIL FREE' INCENTIVE

➤ Luxury river cruise line AmaWaterways has reintroduced its 'Sell Five, Sail Free' incentive, giving agents the chance to win a complimentary seven-night cruise for two.

To qualify, agents must make five new bookings for any AmaWaterways itinerary that departs before 31 December 2025, with a complimentary cruise through the heart of Europe or on the Mekong up for grabs. Meanwhile, agents who make ten new bookings will earn a complimentary seven-night cruise on AmaWaterways' double-width ship *AmaMagna*.

All client cruises must have departed before the agent's complimentary cruise can be confirmed.



OCEANIA CRUISE UP FOR GRABS

Agents who watch all five of Oceania Cruises' new training videos by 31 December will be entered into a draw to win a seven-day Mediterranean cruise in 2025.

Five 15-minute videos can be accessed on the line's online training platform, with content focusing on Oceania's brand pillars, fleet overview and its simply MORE value offer. The videos are hosted by Oceania's sales team and include downloadable assets.

"We are delighted to announce this new training platform for our valued trade partners," said Jason Worth, vice president of international sales. "We hope that these new videos will help us reach many new travel partners."

ROYAL ROLLS OUT CASH-BASED LOYALTY SYSTEM

➤ Agents have the chance to earn up to £500 per booking with a new trade incentive programme from Royal Caribbean.

Upper Deck is available on the line's online travel agent learning and rewards platform, Club Royal, and allows partners to earn cash-based rewards which increase depending on the booking.

Cash rewards start from £15 for bookings of £2,000 or more and will increase to £30 for bookings of £5,000 or more; £60 for bookings of £10,000 or more; £150 for bookings of £25,000 or more; and £500 for bookings of £50,000 or more. Money will be available on a prepaid digital Mastercard that will be delivered after the booking has been confirmed.





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Offer ends Oct 31, 2024.

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Cabins & Suites
up to **50% off**
1st & 2nd Guests*

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7 Nights

Desert Days

2024 - 2025

Celestyal Journey Sailings

Itinerary#

**Doha • Bahrain • Dubai • Khasab
Sir Bani Yas Island • Abu Dhabi • Doha**

2024: Dec 7, 14

2025: Jan 4; Feb 15, 22; Mar 1

*Roundtrips from Dubai also available

Now from only
£469pp



7 Nights

Desert Days

2025 - 2026

Celestyal Journey Sailings

Itinerary#

**Doha • Dubai • Sir Bani Yas Island
Abu Dhabi • Bahrain • Doha**

2025: Dec 13, 20, 27

2026: Jan 3, 10, 17, 24, 31; Feb 7, 14, 21, 28;
Mar 7, 14; Nov 28; Dec 5, 12, 19, 26

*Roundtrips from Dubai also available

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*All prices are per-person, based on a double occupancy of the stateroom and are quoted in: €/\$/£/AUS. Celestyal Experience fares include accommodation on board in the booked category, on-board dining and complimentary select drinks and beverages during food service hours, all port and service charges and entertainment program on board. Moreover an €75/\$85/£65/AUS\$120 discount for pre-booked shore excursions is included. Booking window is September 1st, 2024 to October 31st, 2024 for the selected cruises. Offer is valid for new, individual bookings. It is not valid for groups and cannot be held as group block. Reduced rate space is capacity controlled and may be withdrawn at any time with, or without notice. Celestyal Cruises reserves the right to add, change or modify reduced rate conditions at any time, without notification. Port and service charges and any other surcharges are not commissionable even if indicated as included in the cruise rate. Celestyal's Deposit and Cancellation standard policies apply based on the booking/sailing date. Celestyal reserves the right to correct any incorrect information due to a human error, typographical error or technical error. Other restrictions may apply. In the event of any discrepancies between the rates stated herein and the rates displayed in the Reservation System, the rates provided by the Reservation System shall prevail and be deemed as the correct and binding rates for all purpose. Ports of call and their order may vary. The general terms and conditions of Celestyal apply.

A Celestyal cruise offers your customers more



Tread Like a Local

Uniquely immersive excursions.
Onboard cultural experiences.



Live Your Dream

From iconic stops to hidden gems.
Itineraries curated to the individual.



Out of this World Value

Incredible inclusive fares.
The perfect cruising packages.



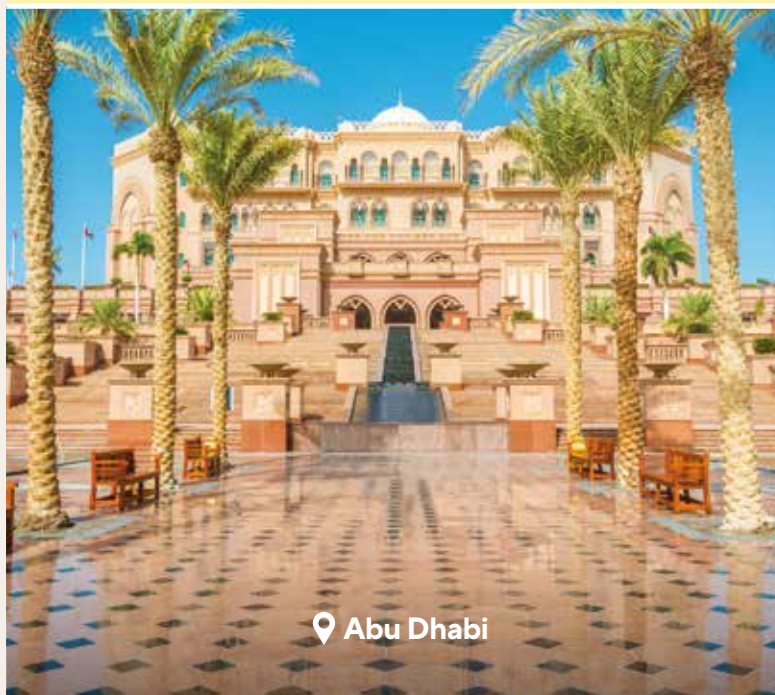
More to Discover

We prioritize port time.
A boutique fleet can do more.



Feel at Home Wherever

The warmest welcome, always.
Our crew are multilingual.



Abu Dhabi



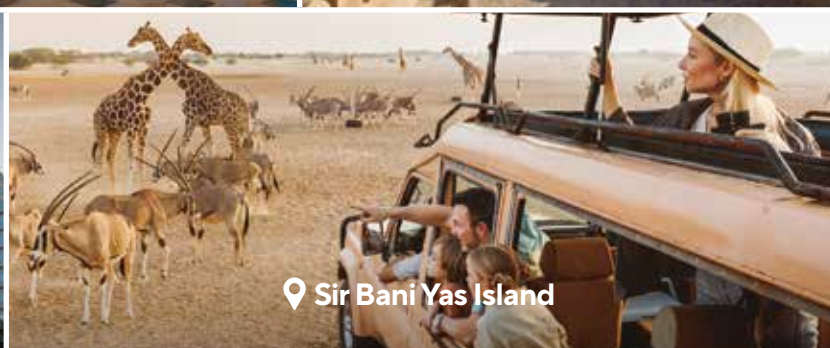
Dubai



Khasab



Bahrain



Sir Bani Yas Island



Doha

You just have to be there.



JOY OF THE JOURNEY

Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines has been perfecting intimate sailing experiences for more than 175 years. We take a look at why smaller might just be better

Imagine sauntering up to an ocean-facing bar during a leisurely day at sea, where a friendly bartender greets you with a smile and asks: “Your usual?”. Picture stepping on board after a day of exploration ashore, only to be welcomed back warmly by name. And envision a team of waiters and waitresses greeting you each evening and guiding you to your restaurant table to dine in style. These are just a few of the remarkable moments that await travellers on one of Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines’ small-ship sailings.

The line believes that sailing on smaller ships is the key to a more exclusive and memorable time at sea. Each of the line’s three ships – *Bolette*, *Borealis* and *Balmoral* – consist of no

more than 710 cabins, which is rare for ocean vessels that sail to every corner of the globe. Their elegant design, meanwhile, celebrates the nautical aesthetic beloved by cruise-goers.

HERE TO SERVE

Due to the smaller size of its ships, the line can more easily access interesting places, such as Norway’s lesser-known fjords and European cities with narrow waterways and size-restricted bridges. It also means they can dock in the heart of some of the world’s most fascinating locations. Most importantly, though, having fewer guests means the crew can really get to know those on board, ensuring a more tailored experience for all.

Each of the line’s team members are trained to go above and beyond to offer

personalised attention while forging genuine connections. Whether it’s ensuring the dietary requirements for each and every guest are catered for at every dining opportunity or smaller touches like knowing someone’s go-to drink order off by heart, Fred. Olsen’s intimate sailing experiences ensure cruise-goers keep coming back for more.

And as day turns to night, guests can dance the night away with fellow travellers or with Fred. Olsen’s friendly, knowledgeable dance hosts, soundtracked by the tunes of a live band. And if they’re lucky enough to witness the Northern Lights, this momentous occasion becomes even more special with a hot chocolate delivered by a crew member.



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT *Bolette* in Olden; guests can try dog sledding in Alta; *Bolette*'s French Riviera itinerary includes a stop off in the historic city of Cádiz

NEW HORIZONS

Much like its guests, Fred. Olsen is a keen explorer of the world. When it comes to its itineraries, Fred. Olsen's team of journey planners carefully crafts each journey to ensure its ships sail the most imaginative routes and visit the world's most amazing destinations at the best possible times. Whether guests are witnessing the Northern Lights or exploring hidden fjords in Norway, each curated itinerary promises an unforgettable adventure.

New sailings for the 2025/26 season include Norway's Arctic Islands & Mountainous Vistas, which sees *Balmoral* set sail for the picturesque archipelagos of Lofoten and Vesterålen, home to rugged mountains and crystal-clear waters, from 17 June 2025. Meanwhile, from 23 June 2025, *Bolette*

will sail on the Discovering the Colourful French Riviera where the rich beauty of the Côte d'Azur will be on full show when the ship arrives into Marseille. This itinerary will arrive in Provence when lavender and sunflowers are in bloom, while a scenic cruise past Cap de Formentor will provide the perfect sunset moment for budding photographers.

Those searching for an unforgettable cruise a little closer to home can embark on the Scenic Isles & Coastlines of Scotland & Britain itinerary from 7 June 2025 onboard *Balmoral*. Highlights include scenic cruising in Scottish waters that take in dramatic cliffs, rock formations and islets, as well as a jaunt down the west coast to visit the Gardens of Heligan and the Eden Project, enjoying Scillonian crab and Cornish cream tea along the way. ●

“

Fred. Olsen's planners carefully craft each journey to ensure it sails the most imaginative routes

Agent appreciation

To show its gratitude for the trade's ongoing support, Fred. Olsen is offering the chance for agents to claim a case of Virgin Wine when they make three bookings for sailings departing in 2024. Agents can claim up to two mixed cases of Virgin Wines worth £119 RRP, with six bottles inside each bundle.

All agents need to do is make three bookings on 2024 sailings and register them all on the TAC page. The promotion applies to new bookings only and is valid on those made between Tuesday 3rd September and Thursday 31st October 2024 on any 2024 cruise departure. The offer excludes resellers and selected tour operators.



**Fred. Olsen
Cruise Lines**

For more information, visit
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SHIP OF THE MONTH

UTOPIA OF THE SEAS

Heads turned when Royal Caribbean's latest feat of cruise engineering, *Utopia of the Seas*, made its first appearance in Port Canaveral earlier this year. To mark the occasion, the ship's godmother and Grammy-winning artist Meghan Trainor took centre stage to name the vessel before *Utopia* – which Royal Caribbean claims will offer the 'biggest weekend at sea' due to its three- and four-night sailings – departed for Perfect Day at CoCoCay and the Bahamas. Onboard, travellers will find a line-up of more than 40 dining options, five pools, two casinos, a fitness centre and the longest dry slide at sea, as well as a selection of never-before-seen features.

Fast facts

5,668
passengers

2,394
crew

21
dining options

8
neighbourhoods



1 The Royal Promenade

The towering Royal Promenade is the beating heart of the ship. Guests will find a range of food and drink options, including New York-style pizzeria Sorrento's and Caribbean Tiki bar Pesky Parrot, as well as several boutique retail outlets selling duty-free items.



2 Cabins

There are more than 20 cabin options to choose from, including the Royal Luxe Suite, where a group of six can unwind in the master loft, take a dip in the bathroom's spa tub, grab a drink in an expansive living area or take in the ocean views on a private balcony finished with a whirlpool.



3 Pools

Utopia's resort-style pools are strategically placed so guests can enjoy panoramic ocean views while topping up their tans. A new poolside food truck concept, The Spare Tire, meanwhile, serves a variety of yummy bites to snack on, including pulled pork on brioche rolls.



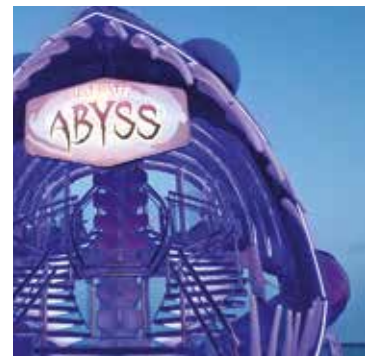
4 Dining

The ship's Royal Railway dining experience is an exciting new addition, where a five-course menu of American classics is served on an immersive Wild West-era railway carriage while moving scenery showcases spectacular American Frontier landscapes.



5 Entertainment

When evening descends the ship's impressive line-up of entertainment comes to life. Families can enjoy ice skating performances and somersaulting aerialists at the AquaTheater, while live jazz and Latin beats ensure there's something for all tastes.



6 Wow factor

Thrill seekers are more than catered for on *Utopia*. They'll find 18 slides, a 30,000-gallon FlowRider surf simulator and The Ultimate Abyss, the longest dry slide at sea which promises to spike the heart rate of even the hardest of adrenaline junkies.



GOING MOBILE

Force24 reveals why lines and agents who aren't incorporating SMS into their marketing strategy are missing out

For as long as people have been walking around with portable phones in their pockets, brands have been using SMS (short message service) to engage with their desired audience. As other platforms like email and social media became more sophisticated, sending marketing messages via text fell out of fashion. However, the evidence around the effectiveness of SMS today is undeniable.

Did you know, for example, that SMS has an average open rate of 98 per cent, according to Crazy Egg? Or that a report from Text Request found that only 5 per cent of SMS subscribers opted out of communications compared to 20 per cent for email? It can even enhance email engagement, with Adobe reporting that sending a follow-up SMS

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Sending a follow-up SMS after an email can amplify open rates by 20-30 per cent

after an email can amplify the latter's open rates by 20-30 per cent. So why is it that only 35 per cent of brands have a formal SMS strategy in place? Here, Force24 shares five ways SMS can improve your cruise marketing strategy.

1 Encourage event attendance
Automating text messages in the lead up to your trade or consumer event helps to increase attendance rates by ensuring the delivery of personalised reminders. Syncing up your marketing automation platform with SMS and WhatsApp can also help to streamline event management processes, as well as offering follow-up campaigns to capitalise on momentum after the event.

2 Promote an exclusive offer
Sending an exclusive offer via SMS helps to instil a sense of urgency, prompting immediate action from recipients and fostering a higher conversion rate. Optimising promotional campaigns for mobile also makes the user experience as seamless and pain-free as possible.

3 Gather valuable insights
Integrating SMS feedback requests into your strategy helps you to systematically gather customer insights, enabling data-driven decision-making that will aid the continuous improvement of your product or service. Connecting your marketing automation platform with survey tools like Survey Monkey can help to take this approach a stage further, gathering feedback via SMS that can instantly influence the direction of your future messaging, marketing strategy and internal focuses.

4 Retarget engaged contacts
If you're struggling to get a response via email, it might be time to incorporate SMS retargeting into your campaigns. This ensures tailored follow-ups across devices, nudging your contacts towards the desired action; whether that's completing a purchase, booking a meeting, attending an event or simply getting a response. In fact, people respond to text messages 7.5 times quicker than email (Gitnux).

5 Leave a lasting first impression
Sending a warm welcome via SMS helps to establish a personal connection with your customers, reaching them on the device that they use the most. This helps to establish a regular cadence of close communication, nurturing your customers throughout their time with you.

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force24.co.uk



CRUISE WITH CONFIDENCE

Do you have customers who fancy themselves as a culinary connoisseur, an aspiring adventurer or a nautical night owl? If so, look no further than Marella Cruises for their next holiday

It goes without saying that a cruise holiday is a great way to broaden one's horizons. After all, new cultures, sights, smells and tastes are at their fingertips during every cruise call. With that in mind, it's important to put your clients holiday hopes in the hands of an operator with a history in providing once-in-a-lifetime adventures for a range of holidaymakers.

This is why Marella Cruises should be your go-to recommendation for

your customers' next getaway – no matter their cruise experience. The operator offers all-inclusive sailings as standard, with all flights operated by parent company TUI, as well as all tips and service charges, making guests' experience – and the booking journey – as smooth as possible.

The line operates a fleet of five ships: *Marella Discovery*, *Marella Discovery 2*, *Marella Explorer*, *Marella Explorer 2* and the newest ship to the fleet, *Marella Voyager*, and itineraries

to the Canary Islands, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean and North Africa.

Onboard, guests will find a vast array of amenities, including a minimum of seven unique restaurants per vessel, West End-style shows, kids' clubs and cabins with private balconies.

However your customers may travel, Marella Cruises is well-equipped to ensure they have a first-class experience. To help you get your clients on board, here we breakdown how the line caters to different demographics.



MARELLA



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Marella caters for a range of demographics; the line operates a fleet of five ships

“

Guests will always find a warm atmosphere with crew remembering their names and favourite cocktails

FOR FOODIES

Guests will find an eclectic range of eating establishments to satisfy every taste and preference while ships sail from port to port.

On *Marella Voyager*, *Marella Explorer 2* and *Marella Explorer*, guests will find Latitude 53, which features spectacular ocean views courtesy of the floor-to-ceiling windows, and serves classics like lobster soufflé, beef wellington and Crêpes Suzette. Meanwhile, on *Marella Discovery* and *Marella Discovery 2*, Gallery 47° is the go-to for authentic Italian delights, such as Neapolitan pizza and freshly made ravioli.

Pair these onboard delights with a stop in one of Palma's tapas restaurants

which barnacle the backstreets and travellers will be too full to fathom a desert (maybe). For the ultimate recommendation, send your clients to Tapas Palma for delicious *albondigas* (Spanish meatballs) ham croquettes and fresh burrata.

FOR FIRST TIMERS

The biggest draw of a Marella Cruises holiday for first-timers – or for those who have cruised before but might be new to the brand – is the fact the company is part of TUI Group, one of the world's biggest travel conglomerates.

This relationship allows the line to offer end-to-end service, making it the only UK cruise operator to take care of

everything, including transfers, flights and accommodation, in one simple booking process. Plus, the 24/7 TUI Guest Experience Centre, TUI reps and onboard crew ensure the line is there to help your customers every step of the way. Once onboard, they'll always find a warm and welcoming atmosphere with friendly crew remembering their names and their favourite cocktails. The line has been endorsed with the Good Housekeeping Reader Recommended stamp of approval, with 90 per cent of its customers saying the service was very good or excellent.

FOR FAMILIES

Travelling the world with little ones can be a stressful task for some customers, especially when they're miles out at sea. But with Marella, it's a breeze.

Each of the line's ships – other than the adults-only *Marella Explorer 2* – comes with free kids' clubs for three to 11 years old. M Club is the best spot for



LEFT Marella offers a range of experiences for families, couples and groups of friends to enjoy

Guests can upgrade to a Premium drinks package and receive upgraded cocktails, premium vodkas, gins, rums and tequilas, a wider choice of whiskies, cognacs and brandies, canned soft drinks and a range of hot and cold drinks from The Coffee Port.

“ Marella Cruises offers a range of sailings and shoreside activities to please your customers’ inner explorer

making friends, joining in with movie sing-alongs, puzzling over quizzes and hunting for treasure in pirate workshops while under the supervision of accredited staff.

Marella Discovery and *Marella Discovery 2*, meanwhile, come complete with a climbing wall – a firm favourite for kids over six – while they can practice their swing over at the nine-hole mini golf course.

Shoreside, Marella offers a range of family-friendly experiences including trips to waterparks and aquariums, as well as mountain biking excursions through picturesque landscapes.

FOR NIGHT OWLS

When it comes to nightlife, you’ll be hard pressed to find a better fit for a customer than a Marella Cruises itinerary. They’ll have the run of at least seven onboard bars, with mid-morning coffees, after-dinner tipples and cocktails on deck all taken care of.

Recommended is the Squid & Anchor for its country pub vibes, complete with wooden paneling, plush upholstery and a lineup of tipples to make customers feel right at home. In the evenings, they can enjoy everything from live bands and musicians to interactive game shows and quizzes.

The line’s All-Inclusive package includes selected wines by the glass, draught beers and ciders, plus bottles and cans, spirits and aperitifs, cocktails, mocktails and soft drinks.

FOR HISTORY BUFFS

Marella Cruises offers a range of sailings and shoreside activities to please the wild at heart.

On the Ancient Icons itinerary, they’ll have the chance to visit Marmaris in Turkey, where classic and natural history are served up in Dalyan. Sail along the river and they’ll pass the fourth-century Tombs of Kings, which depicts the remnants of the Kaunos necropolis that once had over 170 rock-cut graves.

In Limassol, meanwhile, guests can stand in the shadow of the city’s medieval castle and museum before heading for the modern Yermasoyia quarter for a plate of Ora King Salmon and beluga lentils in Anemi Restaurant, against panoramic views of the shore and skyline. ●

Marella Cruises’ itinerary highlights

An eight-night Tapas and Tavernas cruise aboard *Marella Discovery*, from Malaga to Limassol via Palma, Valletta and Souda, departs 24 March 2026, from £1,511pp.

A seven-night Aegean Delights cruise aboard *Marella Discovery 2*, return from Limassol via Izmir, Patmos, Kos Town, Marmaris and Alanya departs, 7 May 2025, from £1,265pp.

A seven-night Cocktails and Coconuts cruise aboard *Marella Discovery 2*, return from Bridgetown via Basseterre, Philipsburg, St John’s and Pointe-A-Pitre, departs 1 January 2026, from £1,683pp.

On the
road with...

Gemma Ashworth

Carnival Cruise Line's senior account manager, UK and international, gives an insight into the line's new private island destination and how it can help agents bolster their sales

How important are UK agents to the success of Carnival in 2024?

Our partnerships with travel agents have always been pivotal to everything we do, and this will continue to be the case as we move forward. A significant proportion of our guests choose to book through travel agents, which is testament to agents' expertise and familiarity with our brand. Our trade relationships really are at the core of how we work.

What selling points are you focusing on when meeting agents?

One of our key points is our exciting new private island destination, Celebration Key, which opens in July 2025. The anticipation and buzz has been building for months, and with good reason. Over recent months we've revealed some of the guest experiences that will be on offer, such as Starfish Lagoon, which will feature a variety of activities for



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

Starfish Lagoon, part of Carnival Cruise Line's new private island Celebration Key; Gemma Ashworth

allow us to discuss our product offerings over a cup of tea and a biscuit to strengthen our partnerships.

What key points should agents focus on when selling Carnival?

Agents should convey that Carnival Cruise Line caters to everyone. Whether it's riding Bolt, the first-ever rollercoaster at sea, to enjoying a cocktail in our adults-only retreat, Serenity, or being captivated by our award-winning shows – there's something suitable for all ages aboard a Carnival ship.

Where should agents who have never sold Carnival before start?

For agents new to selling Carnival, I recommend immersing themselves in our brand. Understanding our unique offerings allows them to convey the excitement to potential guests. We provide various resources, including virtual brand training sessions, webinars, our CCLU training platform, social channels and the expertise of our exceptional Carnival Cruise Line sales team in the UK. 📍

all ages, and Calypso Lagoon, which will have the largest freshwater lagoon in the Caribbean, a sports court and a beachside bar. Agents have been super enthusiastic, and with more than 500 itineraries featuring this destination currently on sale, there is so much choice for the trade.

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

Meeting travel agents face-to-face is a fundamental part of our UK trade strategy and something we take very seriously. Whether through fam trips, ship visits, or office meetings, we aim to connect directly with agents whenever we can. These interactions

“
Meeting travel agents
face-to-face is a fundamental
part of our UK trade strategy





SMALL DETAILS  BIG DIFFERENCE
EARLIEST. EVER. SAVINGS.

A large, multi-decked cruise ship with a green and white color scheme is sailing on a wide river. In the background, there is a cityscape with historic buildings and a hill with a castle.

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Book an Avalon Waterways cruise between the 1st August – 31st October and you'll be automatically entered into a prize draw to win a 7-night cruise including flights, staying in a Panorama Suite.**

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*Book select 2025 Cruises with Avalon Waterways and we will include return flights from £1,999 per person, based on a twin share in a Deluxe Stateroom. Offer is valid for NEW bookings deposited between 18th July and 31st October 2024, for travel on selected dates in 2025. The package price includes round-trip economy flights from London Heathrow, Birmingham, Manchester and Edinburgh, subject to airline availability. Departures from Newcastle, Bristol and Glasgow are available as a supplement. Please note this offer has no cash alternative, however, alternate schedules may be available at an additional cost. Limited to new bookings for UK originating travellers and economy class air tickets. This promotion cannot be applied retroactively to existing bookings, is combinable with welcome-back credits and can be withdrawn at any time. Offer does not apply to instant purchase air or groups of 8 passengers or more. Promotional discounts do not carry forward on voluntarily changed air bookings; other promotions at time of change may be available. Once ticketed, air reservations are subject to change/cancellation penalties of between £35 per ticket and 100% of ticket value. Flight schedules, routings and air carriers are at the discretion of Globus family of brands. Good Housekeeping Reader Recommended survey of Avalon panoramic views - 150 Good Housekeeping readers, 2023. All the package holidays we sell are covered by a scheme of financial protection; all our flight-inclusive holidays are fully protected by the CAA's ATOL scheme and our non-flight holidays are fully protected by ABTA's scheme of financial protection. ** Cruise available on selected itineraries and dates flying from London Heathrow. Alternative departure airports are available for a supplement.)



A NEW DAWN

As Saudi Arabia and Qatar undergo billion-pound transformations, the Middle East's vision for a tourism utopia is steadily becoming a reality.

Jack Carter looks at the latest developments across the region's port destinations and asks whether the investment is enough for it to challenge ocean's established elite



On a typically hot day in mid-May, a crowd of some 33,000 travel professionals made their way up Sheikh Zayed Road and into the air-conditioned halls of the Dubai World Trade Centre for the 2024 edition of Arabian Travel Market. It was a record attendance for the trade show, which is now in its 31st year, with representatives from more than 150 countries gathering for the four-day event.

During the show, the president of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), Julia Simpson, was asked by CNN about whether this was a tipping point for the Gulf's tourism sector. "The GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) and Middle East [are] growing faster than any other region," she told the global news platform. "Revenue numbers [in the United Arab Emirates] have gone up by 50 per cent and the contribution to GDP – in terms of the amount of money that travel and tourism is making and contributing to the economy – has gone up by 25 per cent."

This should come as no real surprise. After all, Dubai – with its glut of five-star hotels and celebrity-endorsed restaurants – has been a well-established holiday destination for more than a decade. The difference is that there's now a growing cohort of GCC nations that are ready to compete in the tourism marketplace. Nations like Saudi Arabia, which earlier this year welcomed its one-millionth visitor. The Kingdom's ochre-hued deserts, tranquil island lagoons and Unesco-protected landmarks

“ There's now a growing cohort of Gulf Cooperation Council nations ready to compete in the tourism marketplace

have been attracting travellers far and wide ever since it launched its first tourist eVisa back in 2019. Getting to explore one of the few remaining destinations untouched by tourism is undoubtedly part of the attraction. However, with 13 immensely ambitious tourism giga-projects currently underway, it's unlikely to remain untouched for long.

One of those projects is Neom: a \$500 billion (£380 billion) renewable energy-powered destination on the northwest coast. Combining island destinations to rival the South Pacific, luxury mountain lodges and wildlife reserves, Neom will be hoping to attract the growing brigade of affluent travellers when work is completed in 2029. Then there's The Line, a 106-mile-long mirror-clad "city" carving through the desert from the foot of the Trojena mountains all the way to the Red Sea. Once complete, it'll accommodate nine million residents and tourists (although recent reports suggest construction plans are being scaled back).

Qatar is another GCC country with serious ambitions. Audiences around the globe became acquainted with Doha's beatific shoreline and futuristic skyscrapers when it became the first Middle East nation to host the FIFA World Cup

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The Corniche promenade in Doha is perfect for a gentle stroll by the waterfront; the Qanat Quartier has been dubbed Qatar's own little Venice; Marriott International plans to open luxury properties in Trojena, Neom's mountain destination

in 2022. Staging the world's most-watched sporting event came at a heavy cost, however, with the *2023 Skift Advisory Thought Leadership Report* revealing that the amount spent on stadiums, infrastructure and all else that came with it exceeded every other World Cup combined. With plans to triple its visitor numbers to six million a year by 2030, the Qatari government will argue it was money well spent.

MAKING WAVES

Now that infrastructure has been laid and ambitious tourism targets are locked in, it's the cruise industry's turn to get in on the action. "Cruise Saudi's goal is to welcome 1.3 million cruise passengers annually by 2035, in line with Saudi's objective to attract 150 million local and international visitors by 2030," says the organisation's chief strategy officer, Ghassan Khan. "We're working closely with our cruise line partners and global organisations, such as CLIA, MedCruise and WTTC, to develop Saudi as a leading cruise destination."

Cruise Saudi officially launched in 2021 to facilitate the Kingdom's entry into the market. The country currently has three ports – Jeddah Islamic Port and Yanbu Commercial Port, both on the Red Sea, and King Abdulaziz Port in Dammam on the Arabian Gulf – with a further seven expected to be operational by 2035. Among the cruise lines homeporting in Saudi will be Aroya Cruises, the first-ever Arabian operator, with onboard features tailored to the preferences of Middle Eastern passengers.

"People are excited to explore new places," Khan explains. "Saudi has never been accessible to international tourists until 2019, so we recognise the unique opportunity we have to showcase a previously unexplored part of the globe to a watching international audience."



RIPPING UP THE RULEBOOK

Convincing travellers to choose the Middle East over tried-and-tested destinations like the Mediterranean is the next challenge for the GCC. Coming late to the market has been fortuitous, though, with the region able to learn from existing destinations to build modern, fit-for-purpose ports that serve the local area.

This was the case when Qatar unveiled its brand-new terminal in November 2022. Estimated to have cost around \$500 million (£380 million), the Doha Grand Cruise Terminal can accommodate two megaships at a time and up to 12,000 people a day. It hosts year-round events and art exhibitions and boasts its own rooftop terrace. There's even a wraparound aquarium guiding passengers from the ship to the customs desk. The port also sits at the end of Doha's seven-kilometre Corniche, meaning locals aren't bothered by crowds of cruise travellers while tourists can reach attractions like the National Museum of Qatar and the Souq Waqif either on foot or by using the new metro system.

"I visited the port with the Celestyal team earlier in the year and I was blown away by the terminal," says Janet Parton, VP of business development for the challenger line. "It's a space where you want to spend time, and it reflects the destination's investment and commitment to making themselves a true player in the cruising space."

The terminal's façade, which consists of 1,154 arches, was designed by architects Hassell Studios, who won the bid in autumn 2018. "The client brief asked for lots of arches as





this is a traditional architectural device across the region,” says Ashley Munday, principal and head of design at the company. “We wanted to create a filigree of arches that could be backlit to give the terminal a real presence at night. Often, port buildings are relegated to background infrastructure, but we feel that terminals especially are both civic buildings as well as ‘front doors’ to the cities where they are located.”

Qatar’s investment is paying off. During the 2023-24 cruise season, the country welcomed a record-breaking 73 cruise ships and more than 378,000 passengers, up from 251,191 passengers the previous season. “The global spotlight on Arabian culture, highlighted by events such as the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, has increased interest in the region, making destinations such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Oman more appealing for cruise travellers,” says Maryam Saoud, head of tourism product support at Qatar Tourism.

The destination’s cruise offering has been buoyed by the recent partnership with Celestyal, with the 1,260-guest *Celestyal Journey* set to

homeport in Doha this winter. Saoud says Visit Qatar plans to forge more partnerships in the near future and add to the growing roster of international cruise lines currently sailing in the Gulf.

“These strategic alliances are essential for driving growth in Qatar’s cruise and tourism industry, supporting the country’s strategic tourism goals of welcoming six million annual visitors by 2030, and establishing Qatar as one of the fastest-growing destinations in the region.”

SAFETY CONCERNS

Billions of pounds have already been spent bringing the Middle East’s utopic tourism vision to life. However, the region still has some serious and concerning obstacles to overcome if it’s to make good on its lofty ambitions. Of course, there are the issues surrounding human rights, which continue to divide travellers. These are compounded by the intensifying conflicts in the Red Sea and between Israel and Palestine.

Virgin Voyages, MSC Cruises and Holland America Line have all been forced to cancel

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Doha’s striking Grand Cruise Terminal consists of 1,154 arches; Saudi’s idyllic lagoons are ideal for relaxing boat excursions; a growing number of GCC nations are determined to give tourists a warm welcome

IN NUMBERS

\$500M

The cost of Doha’s Grand Cruise Terminal, which opened in November 2022

40%

increase in cruise calls to Dubai Harbour Cruise Terminal during the 2022/23 season

1.3M

The number of passengers Saudi Arabia hopes to welcome annually by 2035

sailings that were transiting through the nearby Red Sea area. Even Celestyal, which has aspirations of becoming the region's 'go-to' cruise operator, has been forced to pull its inaugural Arabian Gulf sailing. Khan admits Saudi Arabia has been impacted by the conflict but says demand and appetite from international travellers continues to grow.

According to Phil Nuttall, CEO of The Travel Village Group, the conflict needs to be resolved before the Middle East can become a genuine player in the cruise market. "It's a concern," he says. "You're not going to get buy-in from the general public while a war is happening nearby. We need peace out there to help facilitate the growth and investment the destinations are pouring into tourism."

The conflict is also causing a headache for cruise lines who are eager to increase their tonnage in the region, with the conflict blocking essential sailing routes like the Suez Canal. "A lot of winter business comes from ships sailing around that part of the world," Nuttall explains. "Until we get stability, it's going to be nigh-on impossible for cruise ships to get around."

However, none of these factors will stop agents like Nuttall from pitching the GCC destinations to clients this upcoming winter sun period. "I'm very confident we'll get passengers onto ships this winter," he adds. "The food and hospitality are out of this world. In fact, you could compare the service levels in Qatar with what you get on a cruise ship, so it's a perfect fit."

"You look at the price for hotels in Tenerife and the issues locals are having with overtourism and you realise you could do a lot worse than fly six hours to Dubai and spend a week on a cruise ship." ●



HOT TICKET

Four major openings in the GCC to have on your radar

1 The Red Sea, Saudi Arabia Opened 2023

Last year saw luxury mega-resort The Red Sea (above) welcome its first wave of guests following the opening of its inaugural five-star hotel. The development, which will eventually comprise 50 beach, desert and mountain resorts, will offer a wealth of outdoor activities, including diving in the Al Wajh lagoon, home to the world's fourth-largest coral reef system.

2 Guggenheim Abu Dhabi Opening 2025

The long-awaited Frank Gehry-designed museum will be the largest Guggenheim in the world when it opens on Saadiyat Island next year. The venue will house a prized collection of modern art from around the world, as well as an interactive children's education centre.

3 Trojena, Saudi Arabia. Opening 2027

If a cruise-and-ski holiday in Saudi Arabia sounds a little far-fetched, then think again. Up in the snowy mountains of Trojena, 50km from the gulf of Aqaba, a luxury ski resort within the vast Neom development will begin welcoming guests in 2027 upon completion of its first hotel.

4 Lusail Museum, Doha. Opening 2029

Located on Al Maha Island, Lusail Museum will add to the country's impressive collection of eye-catching cultural venues when it opens in 2029. The museum will be spread across four floors and will include 560,000sq ft of exhibition space dedicated to Orientalist paintings, drawings and sculptures.



In
conversation
with...



SCAN

Regent sales VP Paul Beale
on importance of UK travel
trade to 2026/27 season

Anthony Daniels

Will Payne catches up with Ponant's new UK and Ireland general manager to find out how the line plans to capitalise on the recent expedition cruising boom

In 2023 CLIA reported that the expedition cruise sector saw a 71 per cent increase in passengers compared to 2019, something that Anthony Daniels is keen to make the most of in his new role with luxury expedition operator Ponant.

"The UK market has grown significantly in recent years – but we want more," he admits, as we sit down to discuss his first few weeks with the company. "It has been excellent. The response from the trade has been really amazing, and the support I've received from the board and industry contacts has been almost overwhelming."

Daniels says he will use his experience with lines such as Norwegian Cruise Line, Hurtigruten and Regent Seven Seas Cruises to put Ponant's fleet of 15 ships – which includes luxury icebreaker *Le Commandant Charcot* and yacht *Le Ponant* – front of mind for agents across the UK.

GROWTH AMBITIONS

Since Ponant started operating in the UK in 2011, it has rolled out sterling-based pricing for agents, increased its sales team headcount and cemented the UK market as one of its biggest growth targets. Daniels' appointment reflects that, although he admits the UK is yet to become one of Ponant's top performing markets. "It's simple; the UK can absolutely be one of our biggest markets, up against the likes of France, but we've just got to get that foundation right."



It's simple; the UK can absolutely be one of our biggest markets, up against the likes of France



A key pillar of Daniels' plans for the brand is to make working with the line as easy as possible for UK agents. To achieve this, in the next few months he will look to take on a new member of the team to alleviate the administration, marketing and planning pressures from his on the road sales team.

Another one of Daniels' short-term goals for the line is to secure bonding in the UK for Ponant by beginning the process of securing ATOL certification from September.

TEAM EXPANSION

There's also scope, he says, for the brand to open a dedicated UK office to enhance the booking journey and support for the trade. "But that will take time," Daniels admits. "Right now, I am focused on bringing someone in to take away a lot of the admin work from the team on the road because they are the focal point for everything for agents right now."

"The new hire will allow the team on the ground to spend more quality time with our key agents, who



aren't necessarily the biggest, but they understand our ethos, what we offer and are willing to do business with us."

He believes the line can partner with all types of travel agencies due to the brand's product range, which includes luxury sailings, expedition cruising, itineraries to popular destinations like the Mediterranean, the Arctic, Asia and Australasia, and touring holidays.

EYES ON THE TRADE

It's clear that, having been ever-present in the cruise industry for the best part of 30 years, the importance of agents to the success of a cruise line is not lost on Daniels. While Ponant has hosted several trade ship visits already this year, in addition to training and engagement events, he believes the line can "be a bit smarter" in how it works with the trade.

"Rather than trying to cover every base with every ship visit, we need to be a bit more focused on how we execute those," he says. "We'll be more involved in things like expedition conferences and training sessions, and we'll refocus our ship visits, so they are an immersive experience for our partners, where they get an in-depth tour, lunch and anything else they need to better sell our product."

SUPER SALES

So far this year Ponant has seen a steady stream of business with strong growth year-on-year which, when considering Ponant is yet to have a full structure in place, Daniels believes is a fantastic achievement. "Our clients want to book a year in advance most of the time, if not a bit more, for those big-ticket items."

Despite seeing an uptick in further-out bookings, Ponant's latest business is also continuing to perform

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Anthony Daniels joined Ponant in May; *Le Ponant* in The Kimberley; *Le Commandant Charcot*

What my career has taught me

Be brave

"Our industry offers many opportunities for a wide spectrum of talent and skills, so always keep looking for what your next step is. Training, personal experience and enthusiasm is invaluable."

Get involved

"Your network is key to growth. Attend a range of conferences and industry events, become known and aim to be involved in panel discussions or lead training sessions and presentations."

Enjoy the benefits

"We're lucky to be in such an inspiring industry. Make the most of the opportunities and experience the many varied products and destinations. Share your experiences and also inspire others to travel and join the industry."

well. "Any kind of hook or campaign that we come out with, we don't want it to be price-led, we don't want to focus on discounts, but we will be focusing more on the added value proposition, as that's what our clients in the luxury end of the market look for," Daniels explains.

"We've got to find the right balance between filling the ships at the right price and making sure our guests are happy. By working with the key agents, we're looking at how we can engage more with different consumer profiles." ●

How to grow a cruise agency

Launching a new business can be a terrifying prospect, unless you're one of these five entrepreneurs, of course. **Will Payne** meets the founders who've been and done it to discover how they built a fledgling travel company from the ground up

Working for yourself comes with many perks, from being your own boss to taking the lion's share of any financial rewards that may come your way. It does, however, come with one big caveat: if it fails, you risk losing everything.

An array of cruise agencies have grown from a seed of an idea into record-breaking enterprises. The fact that so many of these ventures are flourishing – despite soaring interest rates, a rampant cost of living crises and the after-effects of a global pandemic – is testament to the health of the cruise sector in 2024.

To help those of you with aspirations of launching a business of your own, we decided to speak to five cruise entrepreneurs to find out what it takes to launch and lead a high-performing enterprise, asking them to share their stories and the lessons they learned along the way.



Robert O'Grady, The Cruise Room

"Opening our own store has long been an ambition of me and my partner, Jonathan Howitt. However, it needed the huge changes we all experienced with the pandemic to give us the push to finally make it happen. We really didn't want to look back in years to come and think 'What if?', so with Jonathan losing his travel position in Ireland, I put my health service management career on hold, and we set about putting The Cruise Room vision into reality.



“When you begin, you're unknown – no reviews, no proof of concept, so it's difficult to get going

"One of the biggest lessons I learnt from doing so is to have patience. We are operating in such a difficult world, and I've had to be patient with our development. I quickly found out that it was going to take three years from opening our doors to even begin to assess whether the business was viable. That's hard when you want to see instant results from the endless hours and investment you put in.

"But the big unknown for us was how the world was going to evolve and whether the industry would bounce back from the pandemic. We've had to be dynamic in response to how it's all unfolded in recent years.

"However, if you had told us three years ago that we'd be where we are now, we would have grabbed it, and we wouldn't have quite believed it, either. We've experienced huge increases in guest numbers and sales along with multiple award nominations, including recently being shortlisted for three Wave Awards. The hard work has paid off.

"So, if you're thinking of doing the same, just remember that starting a travel business is not something you can do on the side or occasionally; you must be incredibly passionate about it. Take some time to research first: speak to account managers, assess your neighbourhood and, most importantly, see what support you can get from a local enterprise hub about setting up a business."



Dan Roche, Crui.se

"Crui.se isn't my first rodeo so the 'starting' was pretty easy. But when you begin, you're an unknown entity – no reviews, no proof of concept – so it's difficult to get going. But once you do, it soon starts to snowball. Don't get me wrong, there were still issues, like cashflow, for example. As we launched in July 2023, we were taking cruise bookings for summer 2024 and our marketing spend didn't reap any rewards until at least February 2024.

"Because we're part of the Hays Independence Group, we don't get any



“

It's important to be eager to learn. We're looking forward to evolving with each step we take

commission until eight weeks before a customer travels, which is great practice, but initially it can be difficult if you're creating a business that's going to challenge an industry.

"I didn't really have any expectations from Crui.se. I love the travel industry and I wanted to create a product that I was proud of and happy with. We have micro goals which are to generate one booking per day, every working day of 2024, which we're ahead of. But the main thing for us is progression – genuinely helping customers, adding better content and functionality to the site, and giving the competition something to think about.

And that is crucial to starting your own venture. Love what you do. It's a massive cliché, but I genuinely look forward to working on Crui.se every day. Also, treat people well. Go above and beyond. I'm full of clichés, but it's true. If you mess up or if there are any issues with flights or sailings then own it – customers will appreciate it.

"Furthermore, try and plan your next steps as much as possible. We're a river cruise specialist. We could venture out into ocean, but we've still so much to do and learn about river. We took our first booking on 16 August 2023; as of 31 July 2024, we've done 208 bookings equalling £1.2 million in value. So, if you're confident, take the leap!"



Ashley Hunt, Swindon Travel Hub

"Having only launched at the start of August, we are very much still learning. It's an exciting journey, that's for sure, with so many opportunities for growth. It's important to be eager to learn – we're looking forward to evolving with each step we take.

"There have, of course, been several unforeseen challenges. Our renovations were slightly delayed, which consequently pushed back our opening date, and the website design took longer than expected. But we didn't let these setbacks dent our vision. We stayed focused on the future and we recognise we still have a lot of work to do to ensure the customer

journey is seamless and enjoyable. At a top line level, we are where we thought we would be at this stage of our journey. We have just launched the store, and our focus for the next six weeks is to solidify our processes, establish clear ownerships, and build our team.

"However, none of this would have been possible without support from our consortium, Barrhead Travel. Make sure you do thorough research and ensure you have a good consortium that provides you with the necessary tools and the freedom to trade openly. This has led to enquiries and bookings performing higher than expected at this early stage, which is very encouraging.

"Now, our short-term goals are to improve the online experience for our customers, expand our distribution strategy both online and offline and work more closely with our cruise line partners. In the longer term, we will be exploring opportunities for additional retail stores, enhancing our online booking capabilities to offer a more seamless experience and build our brand to ensure long-term growth."



Sefton Monk, My Kind of Cruise

"I am often asked, 'Surely when you start your own business you can set your own hours and be your own boss?' My response is that while you can set your own hours, those hours are 24/7, 365 days a year.

To make your idea somewhat successful, you need to be prepared to work constantly. Additionally, you need incredibly thick skin, as people will give you their honest opinions, and 99 per cent of the time, they will say you are wrong or that they don't understand your idea. It's imperative you keep your spirits high and don't be shy to ask for advice as much as possible.

“Also, don’t forget to conduct thorough research. It helped me understand my target audience, their needs, preferences and pain points. Gather customer feedback all the time – this is critical. Use it to improve your services and adapt your approach based on their suggestions and changing market trends. These of course can be tricky to navigate and predict.

“Having started My Kind of Cruise during the pandemic, I had no idea what life would be like when we returned to ‘normal’. The main difficulty arose when it took longer than expected for unrestricted cruising to return. While other travel startups were able to gain momentum quickly, we experienced some stop-and-start traction when it came to building. However, fast-forward a few years and we’re actually a bit further ahead than I expected. The very high traction rate we have seen for a while now has proven the market need for a dedicated cruise booking app.

“We are now under the Hays Travel umbrella and are working to relaunch our offering with the many partners that work with Hays, ensuring our cruises are ABTA-bonded. We are also very focused on building our audience so for now, we will continue with what we are doing, while releasing new features as often as possible to stay ahead of the curve. The USA is in our sights, so watch this space!”



Sam Ballard, Club Voyages

“Even though Club Voyages is my second company, it’s represented a totally different set of challenges to the first. While I was involved in the travel industry, I’d never sold travel before, so that was a real learning curve for me. My product knowledge was pretty good, but I soon discovered that I knew nothing about the actual mechanics and internal systems of travel, which, as a travel agent, are in fact rather important.

“The biggest challenge that I’ve found was saying no to people. As soon as we launched, we started bringing on



There’s something about being able to see a physical manifestation of your brand that is exciting

homeworkers but now, in hindsight, a lot of those people simply weren’t right for us, and we probably weren’t right for them – but that’s okay, it’s all part of the learning process. I could probably have two or three times as many homeworkers as I do now, but it would be a very different looking company. We’ve grown sensibly and with the right people representing us.

“Now, we’re looking at stage two, which saw us move into a physical retail space in Leicester’s Clarendon Place at the start of September. And if you told me we would be in this place now when we launched, I would have laughed you out of the room. With nearly 20 homeworkers, bonded as a tour operator and having just opened our first shop, I didn’t see this coming in my wildest dreams.

“So, in light of all of this, make sure you know your brand and stay true to it. You’ll have many people telling you that this should change, or that won’t work. Listen to the right people, but don’t lose track of what your long-term goals are. After navigating choppy waters at the start of the venture, I recalibrated and stuck to my vision. Now we’re in a good position, but the market feels tough. June and July were relatively slow, but we still finished July 35 per cent up year-on-year.

“Looking ahead, we won’t take our eye off growing our homeworkers. That will continue to be a major part of our business, but it must be the right people. Retail is going to be interesting and I’m excited to see where that could lead. There’s something about being able to see a physical manifestation of your brand that is exciting. So if you’re on the fence – go for it.” ●



THE PERFECT PACKAGE

Boost your wave sales with Cruise Plus and be in with a chance of winning a cruise-and-stay holiday fund worth £4,000



Boasting partnerships with the world's leading cruise operators and airlines, more than 25 touring companies and a portfolio of over 100,000 hotels, Cruise Plus has been helping travel agents craft their clients' dream holidays for the best part of 20 years. Indeed, the Gold Medal sister brand's collection of exceptional itineraries provides an impressive array of pre- and post-cruise experiences that perfectly complement a holiday at sea.

And now, with the wave period on the horizon, Cruise Plus is giving agents the chance to win a £4,000 holiday fund to spend on their own cruise-and-stay escape. The winning agent can choose to go anywhere they like, with the Cruise Plus experts on hand to tailor their ideal itinerary, combining flights, hotel stays, tours and cruising. To enter, agents need to make a Cruise Plus package booking between now and 31 October 2024. All bookings will be entered into a prize draw before winners are chosen.

To help the trade ramp up their cruise-and-stay holidays during the competition period, Cruise Plus has published a variety of marketing assets, including a printed book which has been



sent to more than 300 agents across the UK to rack in store. In addition to this, posters, social media assets and a wealth of information are available for agents to download and share via Cruise Plus' campaign hub, which can be found at goldmedal.co.uk/cruise-plus.

WHY CHOOSE CRUISE PLUS?

The package holiday operator's vast partnership network means it can give travel agents access to out-of-date range flights that are unavailable to most consumers, as well as favourable accommodation rates. This lets Cruise Plus package cruise-and-stay holidays into late 2025 and into 2026 to meet growing market demand.

Mark Henderson, head of specialist product, Cruise Plus, explains: "Over the past few months, our team has seen a great increase for enquiries and bookings travelling in what we'd consider a more traditional departure lead time for the cruise sector, with an average of 70 per cent of bookings



We've seen departures more than 365 days out increase by over 18 per cent



now departing six months to a year out from time of booking. We've also seen departures more than 365 days out increase by over 18 per cent. This is following a period of time where 'lates' were strong for Cruise Plus."

To meet the ever-changing market requirements for today's discerning travellers, Cruise Plus has split its carefully crafted itineraries into three departure periods. These include offers departing before April 2025, ideal for those still seeking last-minute winter sun; summer 2025, which includes family-friendly options – a holiday type that has grown by more than 20 per cent year on year; and autumn winter 2025/26, supported by out-of-date-range flights.

Agents who look out for the 'plus' icon on each of Cruise Plus' bespoke itineraries can read more about the incredible experiences that make each holiday unique. There, they can find stays in captivating cities or hidden gem locations, iconic rail journeys, escorted tours from trusted partners and attraction tickets for added excitement.

LUXURY ON THE UP

Since the start of April 2023, Cruise Plus has seen its luxury sales grow by 338 per cent, outpacing all other sectors of the market. This has led to the growth of Cruise Plus' luxury arm, Luxury by Cruise Plus, with Regent Seven Seas recently being added to its portfolio of high-end operators. The line joins Seabourn, Silversea, Explora Journeys, Azamara, Oceania Cruises and Ponant in its portfolio.

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

A wellness area onboard *Explora I*; guests can soak up the sun with Regent Seven Seas; Gold Medal's Mark Henderson

Why book with Cruise Plus?

More choice

Access to more than 30 cruise lines, 230 airlines and 100,000 hotel options.

End-to-end service

Assistance from Cruise Plus' ring-fenced sales, admin and marketing teams.

Enticing incentives

Rich Farebank Rewards scheme, with payment at time of booking.

"The launch of new luxury cruise ships throughout 2023 and 2024 has helped increase travellers' awareness and excitement for luxury cruising," says Henderson.

"This sector of the market continues to attract those who may be new to cruise too, seeing guests transition from luxury land-based properties to small luxurious cruise ships that offer clients the highest levels of service and cuisine, along with excellent entertainment and relaxation options.

"These ships often focus on experiences in each destination, with more stops, longer stays in port, or overnights in key locations across the world, meaning guests feel they are receiving even more from their holiday." ●

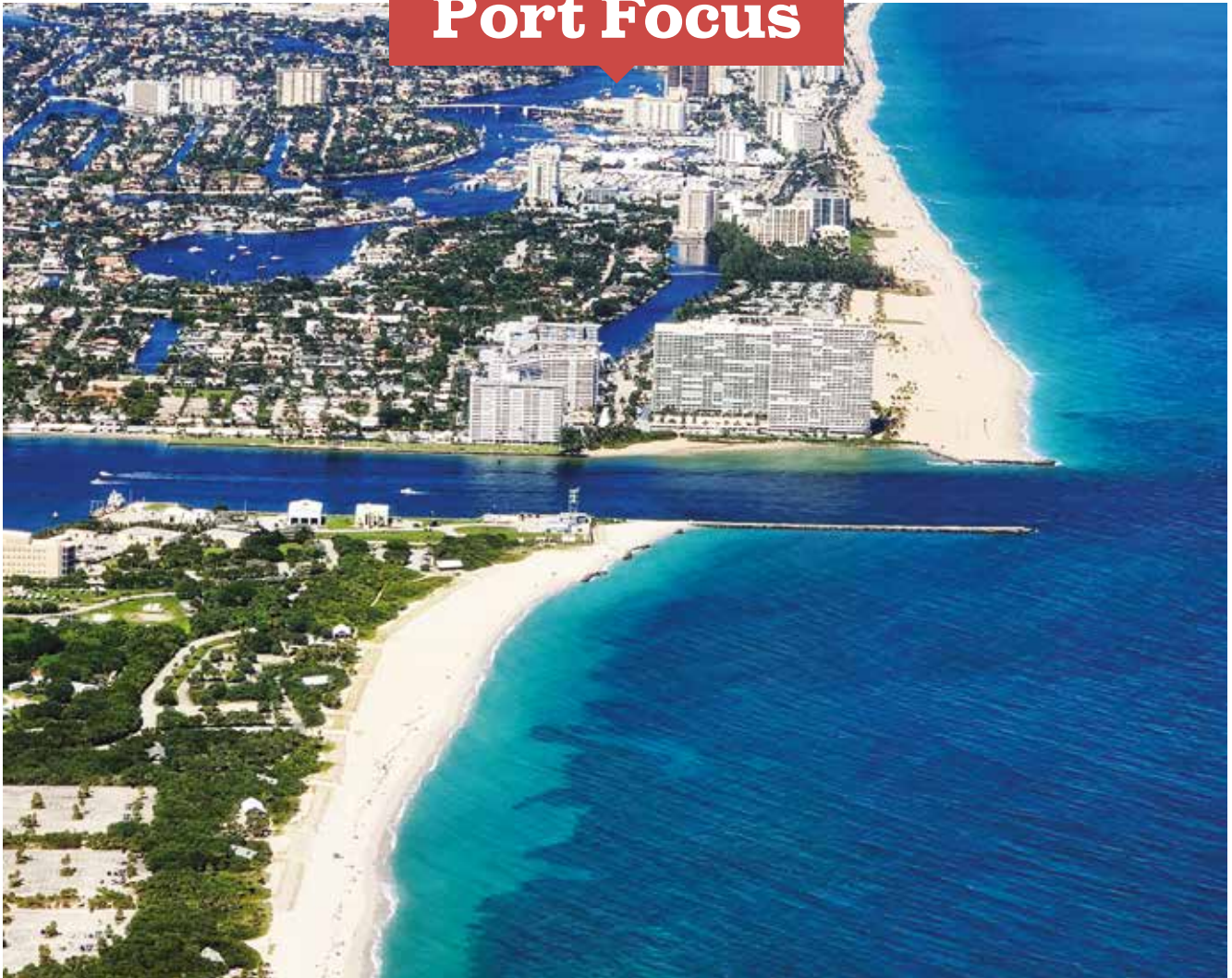
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STARRY NIGHTS

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HIGHLIGHTS • FOOD & DRINKS
SHOPPING • ITINERARIES**Port Focus**

Fort Lauderdale

Creamy sands fringed by palm trees, waterways adorned with mansions and a thriving culinary scene captivate visitors in Miami's neighbouring port city, writes **Sarah Riches**

Sprawling along Florida's shores, Fort Lauderdale lies a 30-minute drive north of Miami. With 265km of canals, the city is dubbed the Venice of America, though its past is closer to that of Spain than Italy after Spanish explorers arrived in 1513.

By the 1700s, most of the land's indigenous inhabitants, the Tequesta, had died battling the Spanish,

succumbed to European diseases or fled to Cuba. The Spanish also won battles against the Seminole tribe in the 1800s, before being defeated by the US, although Spain's influence is still evident today both in people and place names.

The creation of the Florida East Coast Railway in the late 1800s marked the beginning of a prosperous era for the region before a period of decline

following a 1926 hurricane and the 1930s Great Depression.

But the Sunshine State's beaches and network of canals lured visitors back, and today CLIA ranks the city's Port Everglades as the world's third busiest port for embarking on a cruise. If your clients are planning a visit, here's our cheat-sheet for an unforgettable Florida mini-break.



3 unmissable things to do HIT THE BEACH

The city is blessed with beaches, from Las Olas north of the cruise terminal to Dania and Hollywood to the south. Guests who only have time to visit one should make a beeline for Fort Lauderdale Beach – a five-kilometre strip embellished with palm trees.

Visitors can kayak under a lifeguard's watch, cycle along the adjacent promenade or head to the pedestrian tunnel that connects to Hugh Taylor Birch State Park, popular with picnickers and roller-skaters. Park manager Shane Zigler says: "With a freshwater lake between the famed beach and intercoastal waterway, it's a haven of tranquillity."

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Fort Lauderdale is blessed with amazing beaches; exploring the city by boat is a great way to get a sense of the place; enjoy the wildlife of Flamingo Gardens; Frederic Bartlett's beautifully lit art studio in Bonnet House

“**Las Olas Boulevard's scenic canal views and charming streets make it a favourite among locals and visitors**”

LAS OLAS BOULEVARD

Fort Lauderdale's answer to California's Rodeo Drive, with shops, art galleries and restaurants, Las Olas Boulevard stretches four kilometres west of the coast – which is fitting, as its name is Spanish for 'the waves.' Here, guests can peruse the city's oldest surviving home, Historic Stranahan House Museum, and New River Fine Art, which exhibits works by established and emerging artists.

Graphic designer Isaiah Etienne says: "Known for its vibrant atmosphere, Las Olas Boulevard's scenic canal views and charming streets make it a favourite spot among locals and visitors."

BONNET HOUSE MUSEUM & GARDENS

This 35-acre Caribbean-plantation-style villa, built in 1920 and home to the artist Frederic Clay Bartlett and his wife, is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

CEO Patrick Shavloske says: "It was designed to be a beachside artist retreat as well as a home. The studio is my favourite room. One can still imagine Frederic at his easel, with light from the north-facing window illuminating the room." Highlights include browsing the art collection, enjoying the spectacular array of orchids and ambling around the estate looking for raccoons and monkeys in the forest or manatees bathing in the water.





Three activities for repeat visitors

OFFBEAT

Why go bar hopping when guests can hop on the bar? That's the tagline of Cruisin' Tikis, a floating bar that drifts down the New River. Sheltered by a palm-fringed roof, the wraparound bar comes with six bamboo stools, a captain and a pirate ship-style steering wheel.

Once armed with some refreshments and a floral shirt (optional), guests can relax on a scenic sail from Historic Downtowner, a riverside terrace with live bands, DJs and trivia nights. Passengers can also hop in for a swim, spot dolphins, stingrays and turtles or enjoy sundowners on a charter set to music.

UNIQUE

A former orange grove, Flamingo Gardens was established in 1927 as a home for rare and native plant species such as champion trees, which can grow up to 40m high. Stretching over 25 hectares – the same size as the Hampton Court Palace grounds in Surrey – there's ample space for untouched tropical hardwood forest, cacti and orchid gardens. There's

“ Cruisin' Tikis' tiki bar takes guests on a scenic sail where they can take a dip along the way

also a birds of prey centre, butterfly conservatory and a sanctuary for injured wildlife, like its namesake, as well as alligators, panthers, peacocks and bobcats.

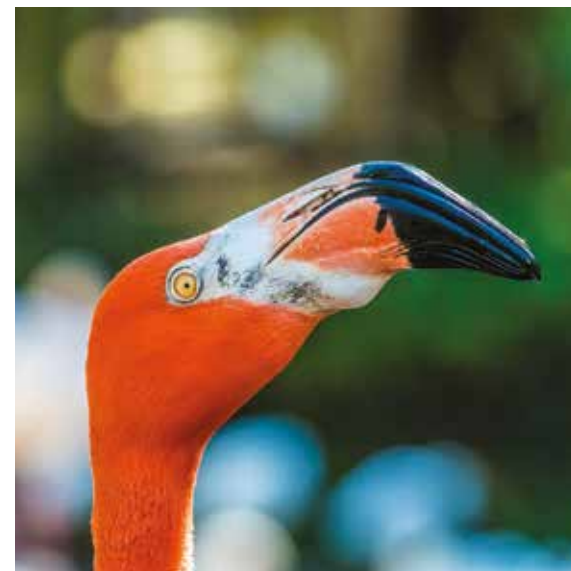
OUTDOOR

Exploring the city's waterways by boat is a great way to get a sense of the place. Those on a budget can board LauderGo!'s free water taxi from near Historic Stranahan House Museum on the New River's north bank to Tarpon River on the south bank.

If time allows in port after dusk, visitors can opt for Flamingo Yacht Charters' Monterey sunset boat ride to see the marina, 1930s riverboats and homes along Millionaire's Row. Alternatively, guests can unwind under a full moon in a Venetian gondola with Las Olas Gondola.

Three places to eat BUDGET

A Fort Lauderdale institution, Jaxson's Ice Cream Parlour & Restaurant has been serving hot dogs and burgers in the Dania Beach neighbourhood since 1956. It has everything guests could want from a classic American diner, from the red-and-white striped awning and miniature carousel for children to walls





LEFT Maine lobster thermidor is one of the not-to-miss signature dishes at Four Seasons Hotel at The Surf Club in Surfside

plastered with curios like car number plates. A sundae to share is a popular go-to and it'll come with paper Stars and Stripes poking out of mounds of whipped cream sprinkled with hundreds and thousands. Its signature dessert comes with the works – and it's served in a kitchen sink.

MID-RANGE

Perched upon the banks of Lake Placid, Cap's Place Island Restaurant is named after its first owner, Captain Theodore Knight. Dating back to 1928, it's on the National Register of Historic Places – Franklin D Roosevelt and Winston Churchill met here in the Second World War, and Al Capone and the Beatles' George Harrison have

dined here, too. Menu highlights include crab cakes, grouper chowder or its speciality, hearts of palm salad.

PREMIUM

Four Seasons Hotel at The Surf Club in Surfside has attracted the rich and famous since 1930, and its rebuilt The Surf Club Restaurant still draws gourmets today. Guests are invited to pull up a stool by the golden backlit bar or sink into velvet banquettes in baby pink and blue by murals of beaches that trick the eye. Signature dishes include Maine lobster thermidor and coconut chiffon cake.

Travel responsibly

Chef Regina Silva raises funds for her community by inviting guests to dine under the stars at Regina's Farm, surrounded by roaming chickens and rabbits. Visitors can take a tractor ride, mingle with other guests and sip coffee or sugarcane as Regina serves homecooked Brazilian cheese bread, corn and bacon soup and flans prepared on a woodburning stove.

“
Jaxson's Ice Cream Parlour & Restaurant is the epitome of the classic American diner

Local tips



“The Riverwalk starts at Broward Center for the Performing Arts and leads all the way to the Riverside Hotel Fort Lauderdale on Las Olas Boulevard. It's a beautiful three-kilometre walk where you can stop by cafés, people and puppy watch and see boats.”

MARIE HAUTIGAN
Headteacher, Piper High School



“William Chrisant & Sons' Old Florida Book Shop in Dania Beach is delightful. It has antique lamps and ceiling-high bookshelves filled with vintage and rare books, maps, magazines and affordable used finds. If you love books, history and art, it's a must-see.”

GWEN PRATESI
Writer

Trip Planner

Disney Cruise Line

The five-night Western Caribbean Cruise aboard *Disney Dream*, return from Fort Lauderdale via Cozumel and Disney Castaway Cay, departs on 21 December 2024, from £4,046pp.
disneycruise.disney.go.com

Celebrity

The six-night Grand Cayman, Jamaica and Bahamas cruise aboard *Celebrity Reflection*, return from Fort Lauderdale via George Town, Ocho Rios and Bimini, departs on 4 May 2025, from £442pp.
celebritycruises.com

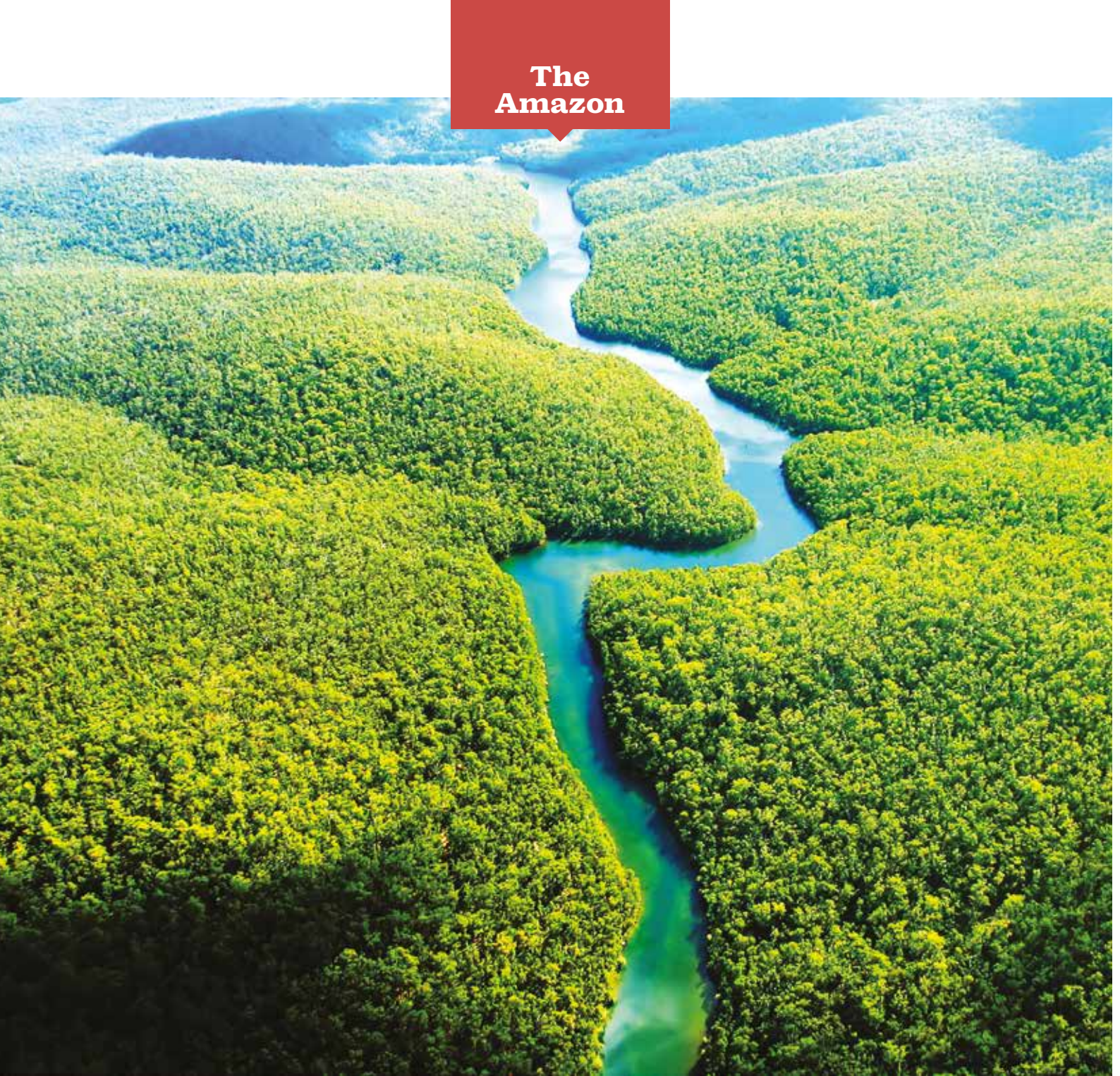
DISCOVER EPIC ADVENTURES



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An aerial photograph showing a winding river with a milky, light-brown hue, characteristic of the Amazon. The river meanders through a vast, dense forest of vibrant green trees. The perspective is from directly above, looking down at the river as it snakes through the jungle. A red banner is positioned at the top center of the image.

**The
Amazon**

Wild at heart

Both enchanting and unfathomably vast, a river cruise along The Amazon invites guests to go off-grid in luxurious comfort, writes **Gilly Pickup**



SCAN

Learn more about the world's most exciting waterways, from the Nile to the Mekong

FROM LEFT The Amazon is the largest river in the world by volume and home to the world's biggest rainforest; intrepid travellers will find a myriad of adventures along the river's 4,000 miles

Mighty, majestic, and mammoth – as far as rivers go, the 4,000-mile-long Amazon is something of a superstar. For starters, it is the largest river in the world in terms of water volume, though not quite the longest (that accolade goes to the Nile). It's the world's widest river, fanning out to 30 miles in the wet season, and home to the world's largest rainforest, making its scale and diversity unparalleled.

From its source in the Peruvian Andes, the navigable river winds its way through a swathe of countries in the heart of South America, including Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela, before finishing its marathon journey on Brazil's Atlantic coast. The Amazon Basin covers an area larger than Western Europe, but biodiversity is at its greatest in the Peruvian region where the rainforest is untamed.

According to Carly Perkins, senior marketing manager, Seabourn, the river holds immense appeal. "There is high demand for the Amazon and our 2024 Amazon Voyages are sold out, so this is definitely a product that should be booked early," she says.

“ South American cruises are growing in popularity, and price reductions are enticing newcomers

"Highlights include the city of Manaus and its Italianate pink opera house or Santarem with its Portuguese heritage."

Seabourn allows cruise-goers to combine an Amazon adventure with a sail through the Caribbean during its 14-day Wild Guianas to the Amazon Basin voyage, which departs from Barbados throughout October.

The three main areas of the Amazon which most cruise ships explore are the Peruvian and Brazilian sections and Ecuador's Napo River, an Amazon tributary. Those craving truly intrepid travel – where night-time canoe trips and after-dark jungle treks are on the itinerary, along with giant bugs and colourful spiders – could opt for the less-travelled Bolivian section.

In October 2025, Swan Hellenic will offer an inaugural 19-night voyage on *SH Vega*, which Antony Jinman,

expedition leader and guide says will navigate from Belem and through Brazil's Beves Narrows to see the Thousand Lake region. "This is one of the Amazon's most fascinating stretches," he explains. "Home to traditional Caboclo communities in Aquiqui, we'll meet them to learn about their way of life. Onboard expert lecturers will introduce the history and life of the region."

Dave Mills, chief commercial officer, Iglu Cruise says, "South American cruises are growing in popularity, but healthy price reductions are enticing newcomers to book. This is fairly unique in that it's clearly otherwise an incredibly hard region to visit, without needing to fly. Our top-selling cruise including the Amazon is a P&O no-fly sailing from Southampton, a winter special, departing early in the new year."

UNMISSABLE ATTRACTIONS

Speaking of Manaus, a major port destination in northwest Brazil, there a natural phenomenon occurs when two Amazon tributaries come into contact with one another. Rio Negro's dark waters meet, though don't immediately mix with, the Solimões sandy-coloured waters to create the aptly named



‘Meeting of the Waters’. The two-tone colour river flows for 37 miles before mixing fully.

Further east up the Brazilian Amazon, Santarém provides cruise-goers with an authentic taste of rainforest culture, with plenty of museums and nature walks to swathe sandy beaches for visitors to get stuck into. Most cruises call here, docking at the new-ish Docas de Santarém terminal. Passengers also have the chance to visit indigenous villages in the Amazon’s depths, witnessing a totally different way of life to the majority of western and metropolitan society.

Then, of course, there’s the wildlife. “While sailing through the Marañón and the Ucayali, guests can come face to face with caimans, three-toed sloths and toucans and meet taricaya turtles in their natural habitat,” explains Francesco Galli Zugaro, founder and CEO of Aqua Expeditions.

“Our incredible naturalist guides know this area like the back of their hand and help guests spot these creatures. Not only do our guides share their personal stories and unearth the jungle’s secrets,

but they can also mimic the calls of animals to lure them into view.”

It should be no surprise that the Amazon is home to a welter of peculiar animals, many of which can be spotted during more adventurous shore excursions. For instance, there’s the caquetá titi monkey, which purrs like a cat or the kinkajou, similar to a raccoon, which barks like a dog and can rotate its ankles on its hind legs to help it move through treetops. There’s a type of piranha fish which is vegetarian, a bat which looks like a gremlin and the pink river dolphin with its long snout, thankfully spared from tribal hunting because it is believed to possess supernatural powers. An abundance of exotic birdlife lives here too. A particularly unusual bird is the nocturnal Great Potoo, which cleverly camouflages itself to resemble tree bark.

WHEN TO VISIT

Choosing the best time to visit is entirely up to the traveller, as each season offers its own unique experience. Rainy season, for example, lasts roughly from

Selling tips

1 Sailing the Amazon is no run-of-the-mill cruise, which makes this an excellent opportunity to entice first-timers by emphasising the unique experiences that each itinerary offers.

2 For adventure seekers, highlight the potential for once-in-a-lifetime experiences. Excursions range from jungle treks and mountain biking to ziplining through the rainforest canopy.

3 For wildlife-loving clients, highlight the sheer number of animals and bird species, which they are unlikely to spot elsewhere.



FROM LEFT Guests can come face to face with wildlife like toucans; Zodiacs allow travellers to access smaller rivers, tributaries and channels

December to May, with the temperature around 86 degrees Fahrenheit dropping to approximately 65 degrees in the evening. June to November, the hottest time of year, is dry season, though visitors could still expect some downpours.

Perkins points out that those who choose to visit in October could combine their Amazon adventure with a trip to Antarctica. She explains: "Seabourn offers Amazon voyages during October when expedition ship *Seabourn Venture* repositions to Antarctica for the winter season. With no roads, it is nearly impossible to get a true understanding of this region without seeing it from the water. The key element of an Amazon expedition is being able to

access smaller rivers, tributaries and channels by Zodiac and kayak, giving travellers a unique perspective on the rainforest itself and on the lives of remote communities who make it their home."

Adam Sharp, cruise expert at online travel agent CruiseKings, sums it up when he says: "The sheer size of this distinctive destination will blow you away, while new, unfamiliar animal species and plant life are constantly being discovered."

"One thing is for sure, travellers can expect an authentic, once-in-a-lifetime venture that guarantees to create extraordinary stories to cherish forever." What could be better than that? ●



EXPERT VIEW

Sarah Wikevand, managing director of partnerships, ROL Cruises

"The Amazon river is unlike any other cruise destination. It is a journey into the heart of one of Earth's most diverse, awe-inspiring ecosystems. For first timers, an Amazon cruise offers a blend of adventure and discovery, the chance to explore untouched rainforests, be immersed in remote communities and encounter rare wildlife. Popular shore excursions, like guided jungle treks and visits to indigenous villages, provide unforgettable experiences that make this trip truly extraordinary."

ITINERARIES

1 Seabourn

The eight-night Heart of The Amazon cruise roundtrip from Manaus (Brazil) on *Seabourn Venture* is priced from £7,399pp. Flights not included. Departing 12 October 2025.
[Seabourn.com](https://seabourn.com)

2 G Adventures

The eight-night Amazon Riverboat roundtrip from Lima (Peru) on *Amatista*, led by Amazon Reserve naturalist guides, from £2,129pp. Flights not included. Departures from October 2024 to December 2025.
[Gadventures.com](https://gadventures.com)

3 Oceania

The 17-night Amazon Trailblazer cruise roundtrip from Bridgetown (Barbados) on *Sirena* is priced from £4,759pp. Flights not included. Departing 4 January 2025.
[Oceaniacruises.com](https://oceaniacruises.com)

BURNING BRIGHT

With its effervescent souqs, world-renowned museums and state-of-the-art cruise terminal, it's no wonder Qatar's star is rising



Speaking at the start of last year's winter sun season, which ran up until April 2024, Qatar Tourism chairman Saad Bin Ali Al Kharji cut a positive figure as he reflected on the country's standing in the cruise and wider travel landscape.

"Cruise tourism is an important pillar through which Qatar will fulfil its national tourism strategy to become one of the world's leading destinations," he announced.

"Qatar's cruise sector has grown strongly in less than a decade, owing to Qatar Tourism's presence in international cruise and travel exhibitions, signed partnerships and agreements, investments in personnel and our collaboration with important public and private stakeholders in Qatar."

Fast-forward to today, and Qatar is gearing up for its biggest ever cruise season to date, with the number of confirmed cruise calls already 45 per cent up compared to last year (you can read more about Qatar's and the wider Middle East region's future aspirations on [page 41](#)).

"We look forward to a new cruise season with visitors from around the world who will have the opportunity to experience Qatar's hospitality and diverse tourism offering," Al Kharji added.

THE WORLD CUP LEGACY

Qatar, with its pristine Corniche and effervescent souqs, was on show for the world to see when the FIFA World Cup came to town in November 2022. A reported one million visitors travelled to this northeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula in just four weeks, with many, many more getting a glimpse of



It's impossible not to see Doha's new port terminal as a statement of intent



the country's unique tourism proposition from their smartphone and television screens.

To handle the significant increase in visitors, the Qatari government invested big in its infrastructure. As well as building more than 100 new hotels and service apartments and constructing a state-of-the-art metro system, the multi-million-pound Grand Cruise Terminal was unveiled before the tournament kicked off, coinciding with the naming ceremony of MSC Cruises' largest ship, the 6,774-passenger *World Europa*.

There are some port terminals you simply can't wait to see the back of. Qatar's Grand Cruise Terminal is certainly not one of them. With an 800-metre pier capable of fitting two large ships and handling 12,000 passengers a day – not to mention an art gallery and a spectacular wraparound aquarium – it's impossible not to see Doha's new port terminal as a statement of intent as the country looks to further establish itself as an irresistible cruise destination.

WHAT'S NEW?

Located right on the Doha Corniche and a 40-minute walk from Museum of Islamic Art, the recently redeveloped port is a destination in



itself, with events, local markets and exhibitions taking place throughout the winter.

Crucially, cruise-goers disembarking in Doha can reach the city's top sites, from the Souq Waqif to the world-renowned museums, without needing to be

part of a private pre-arranged tour, which is not always the case with other cruise destinations in the Gulf. Indeed, visitors can enjoy a pleasant walk along the Corniche into Doha city centre or make use of the new metro system.

Another new feature that will excite visitors is the Meryal Waterpark, home to two record-breaking waterslides, as well as a choice of adult- and child-friendly restaurants and retail outlets. Located around a 35-minute drive north of the city centre, visits to the waterpark will be incorporated in numerous shore excursion programmes.

CRUISE LINES

Qatar's 2024/25 cruise season is set to be its biggest yet, with a number of prestigious cruise lines bringing more passengers to the region than ever before. MSC Cruises and Celestyal, which recently increased its presence in the Arabian Gulf by 30 per cent with the addition of *Celestyal Discovery*, will have the largest presence in the region.

Meanwhile, Ponant will offer 10-night sailings between Doha and Muscat, Oman, calling at Khasab, Dubai and Bahrain along the way. Silversea, Norwegian Cruise Line and Regent Seven Seas will also be operating in the region. ●

3 reasons to sell Qatar

1. Qatar's atmospheric souq is a must-visit

Travellers keen to grasp how Qatar has evolved over the centuries need only head to the remarkable Souq Waqif. Cruise guests can spend a day meandering through the shaded alleyways, perusing the hand-woven rugs or enjoying the traditional works on exhibit in the Souq Waqif Art Centre.

2. It's home to a slew of world-famous museums

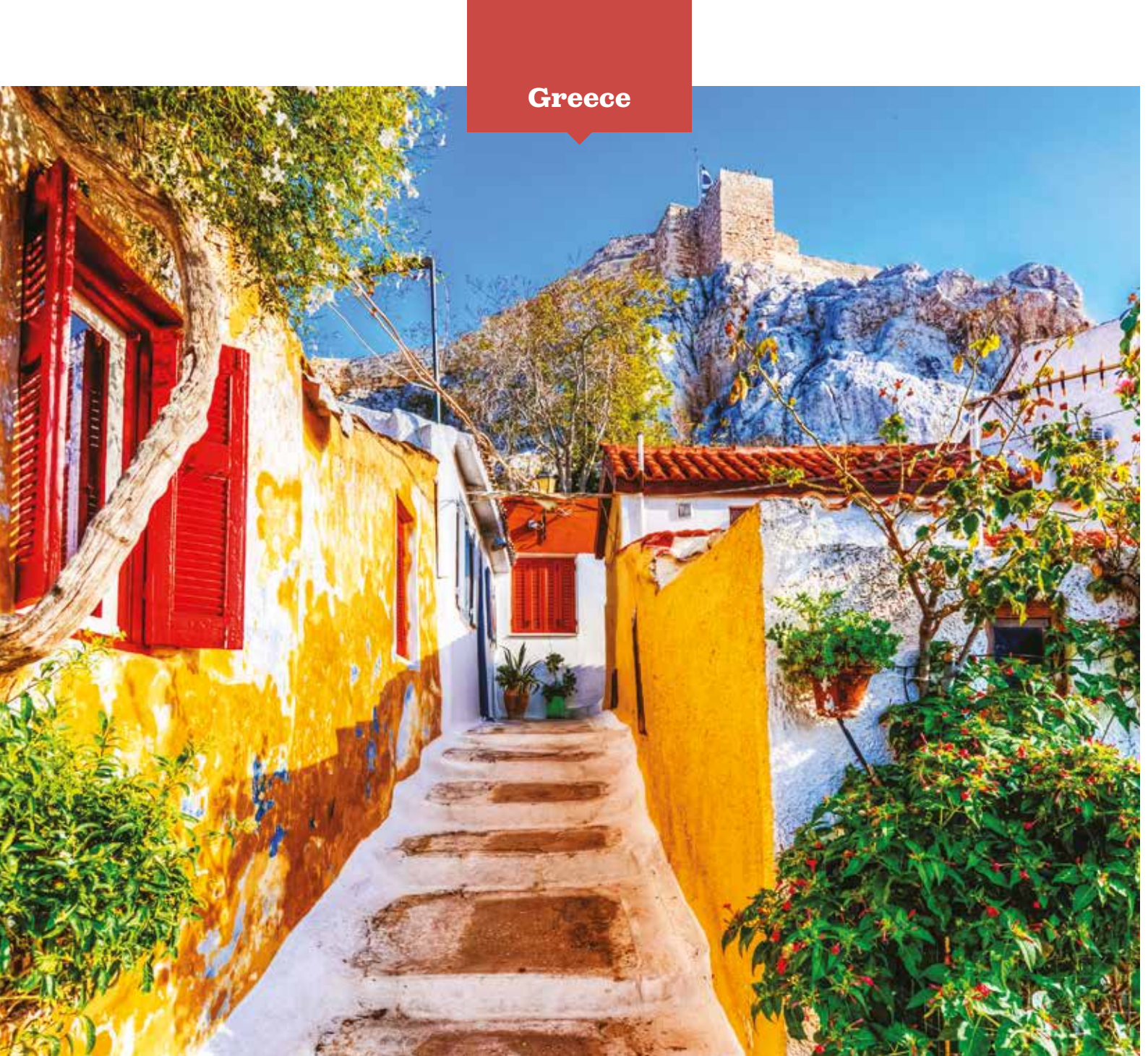
Qatar's quest to become the arts capital of the Arab region is no secret. Indeed, the National Museum of Qatar, the Museum of Islamic Art and the Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art are just a few of the outstanding cultural venues guests can visit during their stay, and another three major art institutions are scheduled to open by 2030.

3. Qatar has an exceptional food scene

Doha's trendy street food markets are starting to get worldwide acclaim, where diners can enjoy crispy chapatis rolled in melt-in-the-mouth meats and vegetable curries, seared shawarma in pitta and, of course, falafel with a deliciously crunchy outer layer.



For more information, visit
visitqatar.com



Greece

Aegean uncovered

From stupendous beaches to wild landscapes and irresistible gastronomy, Greece is a holiday heartthrob with eternal appeal, writes **Rebecca Hall**



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

Meander through Athens' historic Plaka District; enjoy the charms of Little Venice, Mykonos; Olympos women are often seen wearing traditional dress

“

Athens is where the past meets the present. You can have a coffee in a modern café while gazing at thousand-year-old ruins

Iridescent shores, ancient whispers and vibrant traditions are found at every turn in Greece, inviting guests to get lost among mountain villages and cobbled lanes where the allure of this southern Mediterranean country comes to life.

Major lines such as Holland America Line, Celebrity Cruises, and adults-only Virgin Voyages offer adventures starting and ending in Athens, sailing to the Greek islands, Thessaloniki and further afield to Croatia, Montenegro and Turkey. Variety Cruises and Celestyal are local operators, offering in-depth knowledge of the range of destinations. Cruises in Greece are usually seasonal, except with some larger lines, running from May to late October.

Here, we cast our gaze toward Greece's enduring hotspots so you can inspire your clients to book their dream cruise to the Aegean.

ATHENS

The cradle of Western civilisation, Athens breathes history. The Acropolis, crowned by the Parthenon, guards the capital as a testament to ancient Greek architectural brilliance. At its base, the community of Anafiotika is known locally as a Greek island within the mainland, as its cobbles and sugar-cube houses resemble those seen on Greek isles.

As guests meander through the historic Plaka district, the whispers of philosophers from centuries are easily be imagined. Monastiraki Flea Market is a sensory explosion, with aromas of freshly grilled souvlaki and the shouts of stallholders peddling their wares on a Sunday. Local artist Eleni Papadopoulou describes it best. “Athens is where the past meets the present,” she says. “You can have a coffee in a modern café while gazing at thousand-year-old ruins.”

History comes alive at the National Archaeological Museum – the largest

such institution in Greece and the world's most important collection of Greek art and artefacts. Here, visitors will find the golden death mask of Agamemnon and the Antikythera mechanism, a Greek analogue computer dating from 400BCE.

But Athens isn't solely about its heritage; it also has a vibrant contemporary scene. Since the economic crisis of 2008, street art has exploded and intricate murals have transformed the capital into a giant outdoor gallery, packed with social and political messages. A street-art tour with Alternative Athens is a great way to learn more about how the ancient lives in harmony with modern culture.

THESSALONIKI

This student city in the north is a cultural mosaic showcasing its Byzantine, Ottoman and Jewish past. Must-visits for cruise-goers include





Ladadika, a district near the port that's considered the city's heart. Once home to an olive oil market, it's now a hub of nightlife and gastronomy, with many neoclassical buildings converted into tavernas and bars where students, locals and tourists intermingle.

Perched upon the waterfront, the White Tower, the city's symbol, overlooks the Thermaic Gulf and Mount Olympos – mountain of the Gods – in the distance. Along the promenade stands a statue of local hero Alexander the Great astride his horse Bucephalus, while the nearby Rotunda and Arch of Galerius are reminders of Thessaloniki's rich Roman history.

Guests who head further inland past authentic Macedonian architecture to a castle in the Upper Town, Ano Poli, can admire terracotta-tiled roofs and winding lanes. Foodies won't be disappointed, either. Unesco awarded Thessaloniki City of Gastronomy status in 2021, recognising the cultures that have influenced the region's cuisine over the years. This blend of traditions has resulted in specialities such as bougatsa, a custard-filled filo pastry brought to the region by refugees from present-day Turkey in the 1920s.

Visitors should bag a table at Poster for lunch, which is popular with the

business crowd. Niki VerVelidou from Beetroot design studio in Thessaloniki says: "The hot honey and chilli butter focaccia is to die for."

THE CYCLADES

Venturing south, the Cyclades Islands are the quintessential image of Greece. Santorini is a magnet for romantics, with cliffs, blue-domed churches and sugar-cube houses. It's less known for its volcanic vineyards, where vines are deliberately twisted to protect them from the wind. Oenophiles can sample their unique earthy wines on a private tour with Santorini Wine Adventure.

Beyond Santorini's black volcanic sands and the party island of Mykonos, the Cyclades hide underrated havens. Folegandros has a raw beauty, attracting those looking to escape, while Kythnos is even quieter, charming Athenians at weekends due to its easy accessibility by ferry. Aside from its shingle and sandy beaches, it has thermal springs reputed to aid a variety of ailments.

Paros, although more cosmopolitan and hence busier, is no less beautiful than its neighbours, with golden sand, peaks and traditional villages. Syros, the Cycladic Islands' capital, is a cultural hub, richly endowed with fine Venetian and neoclassical architecture.

Selling tips

1 While Athens is renowned for its ancient history, few travellers may be aware of its thriving contemporary culture scene. Encourage clients to book a private street art tour or to visit the National Museum of Contemporary Art, which is home to eye-opening works from boundary-pushing artists.

2 Metropolitan areas like Thessaloniki have been transformed into foodie hotspots, where cruise-goers can tuck into local treats like bougatsa and focaccia.

3 September and October are the best times to sail for guests travelling without children, as they can avoid the heat of July and August and enjoy a quieter voyage with little ones back at school.



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

Olympos residents give a real taste of local culture; a boat trip offers the perfect way to explore the islands further; Corfu is dotted with picturesque villages like Chlomos; Unesco awarded Thessaloniki City of Astronomy status in 2021

THE IONIAN ISLANDS

Heading west, the Ionian Islands beckon, with lush landscapes and fine architecture – the legacy of Venetian rule between the 14th and 18th centuries. Corfu Old Town captivates visitors with pastel-hued buildings, its varied colonial history earning it Unesco world heritage status.

Lefkada, connected to the mainland by a causeway, boasts some of Greece's best beaches, such as Porto Katsiki and Egremni, both of which have limestone cliffs plummeting into turquoise waters. Local event planner Claire Salisbury says: "Lefkada is blessed with amazing beaches plus a unique archipelago of private offshore islands such as Skorpis, once owned by the shipping tycoon Aristotle Onassis."

The legendary home of Odysseus, Ithaca, is less touristy, offering a more introspective journey. The isle's rugged coastline and tranquil bays make it ideal for sailing, and its picturesque harbour in Kioni is perfect for a quiet evening. ●

Get on board

Celebrity Cruises

The 10-night Best of Greece cruise aboard *Infinity*, return from Athens via Volos, Thessaloniki, Limassol (Cyprus), Rhodes, Kusadasi, Santorini and Mykonos, departs on 18 April 2025, from £1,151pp. celebritycruises.com

Variety Cruises

The seven-night Jewels of the Cyclades cruise aboard *Galileo*, return from Athens via Poliegos, Folegandros, Santorini, Antiparos, Paros, Delos, Mykonos, Syros and Kythnos, departs on 25 April 2025, from £1,713pp. varietycruises.com



While Athens is renowned for its ancient history, few travellers may be aware of its contemporary thriving culture scene

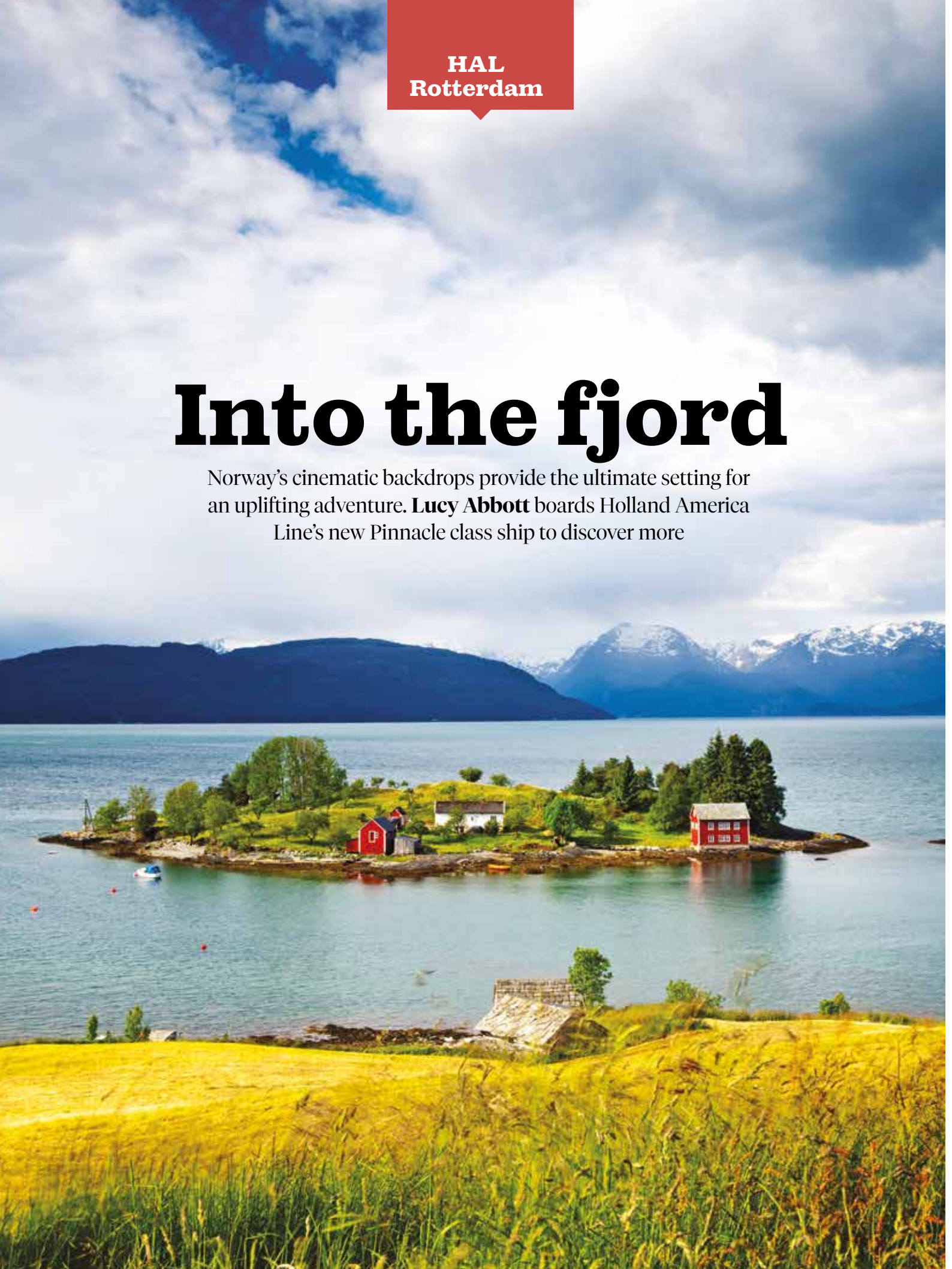
THE DODECANESE

Sailing southeast brings cruise-goers to the Dodecanese. Rhodes stands out with its Old Town, a Unesco World Heritage site. Walking through its cobbled streets, visitors can feel the presence of the Knights of St John while the Palace of the Grand Master and the Street of the Knights hark back to a time of chivalry and conquest.

Symi, with its neoclassical houses and beaches, is perfect for those seeking peace. Fisherman Yannis Papadimitriou says: "Symi is a paradise. The sea is our life, and it's as clear and beautiful as it was in my grandfather's time." While today most visitors come to snorkel in hidden coves, the island is known for its soft, naturally grown sponges, which divers began collecting in the 1840s. The 'dirtier' a sponge looks, the more natural it is. The cleaner looking yellow ones in shops have been treated with chemicals to make them more attractive.

Karpathos, at the southern end of the archipelago, provides a glimpse into traditional Greek island life. In Olympos, women still wear traditional dress and bake bread in communal ovens. The isle's rugged terrain and secluded beaches are ideal for adventurous travellers, many of whom come to windsurf and hike.





HAL
Rotterdam

Into the fjord

Norway's cinematic backdrops provide the ultimate setting for an uplifting adventure. **Lucy Abbott** boards Holland America Line's new Pinnacle class ship to discover more



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT The Hardangerfjord boasts breathtaking scenery; enjoy exploring Norway's picture-perfect villages; animal fans will love taking a leisurely stroll with a llama; *Rotterdam's* luxurious Lido Pool, which transforms into a movie theatre at night



I'm not a strong swimmer. This is a fact I'm not normally troubled by, but due to the fact I'm kayaking in the Norwegian fjords, it's the primary thought consuming my brain. I tentatively glance down and am greeted by a black abyss – a stark reminder that the fjords here are as deep as its hills are high, with the maximum depth being 840m. The view makes my wobbly journey worth it, and as I crane my neck upwards, I can just about see the top of the snow-capped peaks above me.

I'm in Eidfjord in Norway's Vestlandet region on a sea kayaking excursion with Holland America Line (HAL), and thankfully I'm wearing a life jacket. I'm also under the care of a local instructor, who reassures me that typically only one person falls in on each kayaking excursion.

The gentle lapping of the water caused by the group's paddles lulls us into a steady rhythm as we head further into the fjord, admiring waterfalls plunging from cliffs in a foaming cascade. All of a sudden, the silence is broken by a splash, where an upside-down kayak is bobbing next to me, confirming that the day's quota has been filled.

CRUISE CONTROL

I'm on HAL's seven-night Norse Legends itinerary, sailing aboard *Rotterdam*. The ship is the line's newest and the third in its Pinnacle class – which means more space and more dining and entertainment options.



Exploring the ship on my first sea day, I discover that there's a clear focus on art, from a colourful crocheted landscape on deck three to a piano reconstruction made using old ivory keys on deck six. It doesn't come as a surprise to learn that the onboard collection is worth £3.1 million.

Wandering up to deck nine, my attention is drawn to a piece of art made up of thousands of tiny shards of glass, replicating the enchanting movement and sparkling hues of the blue waves around us. This mesmerising piece marks the entrance to the Greenhouse Spa. I get changed and step into its thermal suite, where an inviting blanket of warm air wraps itself around me, before following the heated tiles for a soak in the hydrotherapy pool. There's also an ice-cold water bucket for those feeling particularly brave.

Exiting the spa, I admire how easy it is to navigate this ship, despite its 2,668-guest capacity and 300m length. But there are also plenty of cosy nooks and crannies to retreat to, such as a board game room with five tables, each big enough for four people, and about a dozen games, including a chessboard that seems to be in constant use.

Following the intoxicating scent of freshly baked bread, I find myself in the Lido Market. That's the buffet to you and me – although the combination of self-serve and assisted serving makes it feel more refined than your typical



cruise-ship free-for-all. Using my chosen ingredients, a chef prepares my pasta in front of me and I gratefully lap up a delicious bowlful.

I take it as my journalistic duty to try as many of the ship's specialty eateries as possible, so when dinnertime rolls around, I head straight to Rudi's Sel de Mer, one of *Rotterdam's* four extra-charge restaurants.

This French brasserie is a celebration of everyone's favourite seafood dishes, with a menu boasting broiled lobster tail and whole Dover sole served in a buttery, zesty sauce. I'm a vegetarian, but the melt-in-the-mouth cheese soufflé means I'm not left out. For dessert I select Rudi's face-to-face chocolate, and am presented with a smiling face made from chocolate decorated with fruit, which mirrors my own expression when I see this artistic creation.

Fast facts

2,668

passenger capacity

1,048

crew capacity

300

metres long

4

entertainment venues

ENCHANTING EIDFJORD

Bright white clouds saunter across the sky, providing a frame for the snowy peaks and deep blue waters that welcome us to our first port of call, Eidfjord. Our cruise and travel director, Nick, informs us over the Tannoy that this village has a population of fewer than 1,000 people and is considered one of Norway's most beautiful.

With hopes high and my stomach full from breakfast – a waffle served in the Lido – I disembark for a kayaking excursion. My group stands on a pebble beach while a matter-of-fact guide shows us how to use our paddles, but I can't help letting my focus drift to the fjord, which demands attention for its sheer size.

Before I know it, I'm being pushed from the beach into the calm water and I'm soon getting to grips with the



“ Bright white clouds saunter across the sky, providing a frame for the snowy peaks and deep blue waters of Eidfjord

motion of my tiny craft. Specks of water spatter my arms as I paddle confidently toward the fjord. “V-shaped fjords are shaped by water and U-shaped fjords are formed by ice,” my guide explains.

Eidfjord is located at the end of Hardangerfjord – Norway’s second longest fjord and the fifth longest in the world. I take a moment to look around in awe as a gentle mist from the waterfalls caresses my face. I wish I was brave enough to reach for my phone and snap a picture but I’m afraid of losing my balance.

Returning to dry land, I decide to wander into the village. Pristine is the word that comes to mind, with robotic

grass-cutters working tirelessly to maintain razor-sharp demarcations between properties. I hardly see a car; even another human being is a rarity, with the most noise created by the van that transports supplies to the village once a week.

THE TOWN THAT BURNED

Heading north, we explore Ålesund, a town famously ravaged by a fire in 1904 and subsequently rebuilt in Art Nouveau style. As I navigate its streets, I stumble across Waldehuset – the one house in its eastern district that survived, aptly dubbed The House That Didn’t Burn.

There I meet Cory, a distant relative of the former owner Anders Nor, who ushers me into the living room. “Anders was visited by an angel, who informed him that a fire would occur but his house would be spared,” Cory explains. “As flames lit up the town around him, Anders remained faithful to the angel’s promise and did not flee like others. The house stood unharmed and has been restored to show the décor of the time.”

Afterwards, I explore the town’s colourful buildings, which feature castle-like turrets and gardens bursting with ornamental flowers, before hiking the 418 steps up Mount Aksla, where I’m rewarded by views of the Sunnmøre Alps.

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT The Hardangerfjord is home to some of the country’s most dramatic waterfalls; kayaking offers a unique perspective of a fjord and the surrounding landscapes; the sweeping vistas all around make for a truly memorable cruise

LLAMA DRAMAS

As an animal lover I’m drawn to excursions that allow encounters with wildlife, so as we sail inland to Skjolden all I can think of is my next adventure, walking with llamas. Our party makes its way across an old footbridge over the gushing pale blue Fortun River into the idyllic Morkrid Valley. With gentle hills and quaint huts, the scenery looks straight out of a fairytale.

The llama farm’s British owner realised a lifelong dream when he opened his attraction, choosing this bucolic region as land is much cheaper here than in the UK. As we approach the llamas, they gather at the gate to greet us. I’m paired with Mango, named after his love of eating fruit. He’s a stubborn soul – yet when I feed him a handful of dandelions he becomes putty in my hands.

Alongside the rest of the group, I walk Mango along a stream before following a little-used path into a meadow. The farmer’s young assistant helps me as Mango decides to cool off in the water, almost taking me along with him. As we chat, she says there are only six other students in her year at school. I ask what she does at weekends and she tells me how she likes to go bike-riding across mountainous terrain and swimming in the fjords.

All of a sudden, my fear of the fjords’ depths while kayaking seems silly, and I decide I quite fancy taking a dip – this time without my life jacket. ●

Get on board

HAL’s seven-night Norwegian Fjords with Nordfjord cruise aboard *Rotterdam*, return from Rotterdam via Eidfjord, Ålesund, Nordfjordeid and Bergen, departs on 24 May 2025, from £1,534. [hollandamerica.com](https://www.hollandamerica.com)



The CLIA View

Andy Harmer OBE on how CLIA has engaged with the new government since Keir Starmer was elected in July

It has been a busy few months for the cruise industry, and at CLIA. This summer we have seen lots of holidaymakers enjoying a well-deserved cruise holiday, and we have seen a great range of cruise ships visiting UK ports. As well as supporting our travel agent members with training, events and resources, CLIA also advocates on behalf of agencies and the wider cruise industry to policy makers and government officials.

This year's election brought big political change, not just in terms of a new government, but also in terms of the MPs who represent constituents up and down the country. One of CLIA's roles is to help MPs understand the unique role that cruise has on our inbound, outbound and domestic tourism, and to help explain the huge opportunities that the cruise industry can bring to the UK. One of the ways that we can do this is through ship visits for MPs and local officials, which we got to work on this summer in Scotland and in Wales.

Cruise brings economic benefits to all parts of the UK, and often to areas that



wouldn't ordinarily enjoy the positives of tourism. To this end, cruise is a really important part of the UK's overall tourism agenda.

Politicians are also interested in our sustainability journey. As an industry, we are pursuing net zero emissions by 2050, and are making great strides towards achieving this goal, with a more fuel-efficient fleet than ever before. Indeed, cruise lines have reduced emissions by 16 per cent on average per ship over the past five years.

We are also leading the way in other elements of sustainability, including onboard water treatment and recycling. The politicians we meet gain a better understanding about these efforts, with one member of the Scottish parliament telling his local newspaper that he was

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Andy Harmer; there has been a lot of behind-the-scenes discussion over the summer; CLIA has been talking to MPs and the government about the cruise industry's role in UK tourism and sustainability

"impressed" by the industry's steps towards greater sustainability.

It's not just the new politicians that the industry is working with, but also the new government. In the coming weeks we will be meeting with new ministers to discuss how we can work together to achieve our shared goals. With the government's focus on economic growth, we will also be talking about the opportunities there are for our industry to support the UK economy. Our industry already supports 45,000 jobs across the country, often in coastal communities, and we are very keen to help fast-track the employment opportunities of the future.

We have used the summer period to strengthen our ties with politicians so that we can work together for the future of the cruise industry.

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



“

We are very keen to help fast-track the employment opportunities of the future



CRUISE CHALLENGE

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KEY 2024 DATES

Chelmsford.. Nov 07th **Norwich**..... Nov 21st
London.. Nov 28th

"I WOULD HIGHLY RECOMMEND THIS EVENT TO ALL
AGENTS WHETHER YOU ARE NEW TO CRUISE OR VERY
MUCH ESTABLISHED AS THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING
NEW TO LEARN & WHAT BETTER WAY THAN AT A FUN NIGHT
OUT. I'M ALREADY LOOKING FORWARD TO THE 2025

Muriel Morgan
Travel agent at Travel Counsellors



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