

Cruise lines embed land trips in itineraries

Explora II to sail the
Med in winter

Celebrity readies
for Europe's rivers

Dream Nile cruises

Silver Whisper's 125-day
2029 World Cruise

Arctic or Antarctic?

NCL Luna is next-gen



Cruising

The popularity of cruises continues and is growing. The latest data from the Cruise Lines International Association shows a record-breaking 37,2m passengers sailed globally in 2025 – a 7,5% YOY increase on 2024's 34,6m.



Cruises that incorporate a few days' safari in East Africa are now more sought after. Photo: Abercrombie & Kent

Cruises embed multi-day land trips

KIRAN MOLLOY

VIEWS from the deck, endless culinary options and endless onboard entertainment. While these might have been the critical elements of a cruise in the past, nowadays, cruise lines are upping their game. They offer experiences that see travellers disembark for a few days, for river cruises, overland safaris, rail adventure and once-in-a-lifetime polar experiences. This enables cruise guests to immerse themselves in the spirit of the destination, instead of being passers-by.



Thaybz Khan

Safari and sea

Crystal Cruises has a set of unique cruise and land

experiences. The cruise line, in partnership with Abercrombie & Kent, offers unique safari experiences in Africa and the Galapagos.

"With the support of A&K, Crystal Cruises offers a curated collection of pre- and post-cruise extensions and overland experiences that are designed to take guests beyond the traditional port call," said **Thaybz Khan**, Head of Commercial at Cruises International. Crystal is represented in South Africa by Cruises International.

"These experiences' are typically multi-day and small-group, allowing guests to

explore further inland and in greater depth."

Some recent safari and sail offerings took Crystal cruise-goers to the Masai Mara, the Okavango Delta and the Galapagos, on tailored multi-day itineraries, designed with A&K's safari expertise.

"These extensions' focus is on immersive, destination-led experiences, with carefully planned itineraries that include unique accommodation, specialist guides and access to key sites, depending on the region," explained Khan.

"This type of experience enhances the overall cruise

by adding context and depth to the voyage, allowing the cruise to form part of a broader, more immersive travel experience, rather than being limited to a couple of hours in a port."

Rail and sea

Star Clippers, represented by Cruise Vacations in South Africa, has itineraries that combine sailings with luxury rail adventures.

The 2027 season itineraries across the Mediterranean and Caribbean have been blended with rail-based pre- and post-cruise elements.

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Winter in the Med with Explora

AS THE high-summer crowds depart and a serene stillness settles over the coastlines of Southern Europe and North Africa, Explora Journeys invites guests to experience a new adventure onboard *Explora II*. Titled A Mediterranean Winter, this new cruise in the Journeys Collection captures a soulful and intimate perspective of these shores, showcasing their beauty from November 2026 through March 2027. "The Mediterranean in winter is a collection of subtle contrasts and understated elegance, and we are delighted to dedicate *Explora II* to the region this season, revealing its more contemplative side," says **Anna Nash**, President of Explora Journeys. "Beyond the pace of peak travel, coastal towns become havens of calm, where culture is experienced on a more human scale."

Destinations

A Mediterranean Winter features a curated selection of 46 destinations across ten countries, including Spain, Morocco, Portugal, France, Italy, Malta, Greece and Gibraltar. By blending iconic locations with hidden gems, these enriched journeys offer a sophisticated gateway to the

region's most immersive experiences.

The season is further defined by extended time in port, with four overnight stays in Casablanca, Lisbon, Madeira and Málaga, alongside late departures from Málaga, Cannes, Syracuse and Gibraltar, allowing for deeper and more flexible exploration.

This season also introduces a selection of maiden ports, revealing a rich interplay of cultures and heritage, from the meeting of continents in Ceuta to the layered influences of Algiers, complemented by the unspoiled character of La Gomera, the raw volcanic beauty of Fuerteventura, and the distinct seafood cuisine of Palamós.

The seasonal journeys include the following sailings: December 9-December 21 (Barcelona to Lisbon), December 28-January 4 2027 (Barcelona to Civitavecchia, Rome) and January 14-January 24 2027 (Civitavecchia, Rome to Barcelona).

Highlights

Several journeys feature overnight stays to allow for leisurely exploration of the area, including festive markets in Funchal, Marrakech via Casablanca and the historic heart of Syracuse.



Explora II Conservatory Pool. Photo: Explora Journeys

Guests are also able to enjoy unique winter traditions, from a Christmas carol performance in a Gibraltar cave to New Year fireworks in Cannes.

Onboard

Designed as a floating luxury hotel, *Explora II* offers a naturally unhurried pace, where space and thoughtful design invite true disconnection.

Life on board mirrors the calmer seasonal rhythm found ashore. Guests can retreat to their residential oceanfront suites or relax in a sunlit lounge after a day of exploration.

Culinary experiences onboard are shaped by seasonal ingredients and

regional wines.

In the stillness of the Mediterranean winter, each journey becomes an opportunity to restore and rebalance, with Explora Journeys' Ocean Wellness experiences fostering a quiet sense of calm, clarity and perspective, the essence of the Ocean State of Mind.

Warmer options

For those seeking the warmth of sun-drenched shores during the Northern hemisphere winter months, *Explora I* will sail across the Caribbean to Central and South America, offering a collection of journeys defined by tropical landscapes, vibrant cultures and a relaxed island rhythm.





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Celebrity takes to the rivers

CELEBRITY Cruises is getting ready to roll out its river-cruising product.

The cruise line, better known for ocean cruising, promises river ships with open decks, spacious staterooms, unmatched dining and Celebrity's signature elevated hospitality. And it's offering guests the chance to travel the Rhine and the Danube the Celebrity way.

Priority booking access is now open for 2027 sailings on the groundbreaking *Celebrity Compass* and *Celebrity Seeker* – guests can place a fully refundable £400 (R8 840) deposit to claim a stateroom on one of these two new ships.

Open decks

Onboard the two ships, revolutionary open decks offer the most usable outdoor space of any river ship and they remain accessible throughout the entire journey, giving guests uninterrupted, 360-degree views.

Celebrity Compass and *Celebrity Seeker* will offer

those onboard the chance to dine floating above the river on the Magic Edge – the first-ever cantilevered dining pods – while enjoying regional, destination-driven culinary offerings.

Shaded areas and a top-deck bar and grill maximise cruisers' time on deck while offering zones for every mood, whether it be socialising or disconnecting, in a space designed for year-round comfort. An infinity-edge plunge pool means a chance to cool off while taking in the sights.

Innovation

Celebrity River Cruises' ships will set sail with an innovative hull, a lightweight versatile design that improves river navigation. Celebrity's fleet of river ships advances Royal Caribbean Group's commitment to sustainability. The ships are equipped with the best-in-class hybrid propulsion system, as well as waste management systems, alongside advanced technology to reduce noise and vibration.



Celebrity Compass. Image: Celebrity Cruises

Elegance

Innovative stateroom design across five categories delivers intuitive storage, enhanced configuration and spacious balconies. Rooms feature residential interior design and the most in-room amenities on the river. All guests enjoy complimentary stocked mini bars and destination-inspired amenities – the comfort of luxury linens, bedding, bathrobes and slippers.

Suite guests will enjoy the services of a dedicated, on-demand butler, complimentary exclusive dining, room service and happy hour experiences, complimentary laundry once each sailing, and priority booking for shore excursions.

The first-ever Skylight Infinite Balcony Suites feature a separate living area and a ceiling window

for unbeatable natural light. Vista Balcony Suites and Balcony staterooms offer private escapes with an enhanced design for more usable outdoor space to enjoy a coffee or unwind after a day on shore.

The Infinite Balcony stateroom brings the outside in, while River View staterooms offer generous natural light.

Flavours

Guests will enjoy dining at eight restaurants and bars, all with the unmatched hospitality Celebrity Cruises is known for.

Destination-driven menus that evolve throughout each itinerary deliver local delicacies, from locally-baked morning pastries to regionally-inspired dinners. Complimentary breakfast room service and flexible, all day dining mean 24/7 meal options on the river.

World-class

33 seven-night sailings on the Rhine and Danube in 2027 will take guests through the heart of Europe's culture. They will taste regional wines, walk cobbled village streets and enjoy the new perspective each day offers.

Think of private wine tastings in Austria, thermal baths in Budapest, cycling the riverbanks of the Danube.

Pre- and post-cruise stays, available to book during 2026, can extend guests' time in iconic cities, all seamlessly arranged by the cruise line.

Celebrity Cruises Captain's Club members' loyalty tiers extend to river holidays, giving members access to new and different rewards, recognition, and elevated experiences from ship to shore.

Celebrity is represented by Cruises International in the South African market.

Cruise clients need comprehensive cover

CRUISE holidays offer exceptional value, multiple destinations and a seamless travel experience. However, cruising also introduces unique risks that travellers tend to underestimate.

“Don't overlook the opportunity to ensure clients understand why comprehensive travel insurance is essential when booking a cruise,” **Anrieth Symon**, Head of Travel at Bryte, tells *Travel News*.

Unlike land-based holidays, cruising operates in a self-contained, often remote environment.

Medical

“A medical incident at sea is not just inconvenient; it can be financially devastating. Medical treatment onboard and emergency evacuation to the nearest port or suitable medical facility can run into hundreds of thousands of rand. Standard medical aid schemes may not cover treatment outside South Africa or assist with evacuation from international waters. A comprehensive travel insurance policy with

emergency medical and evacuation cover is therefore critical,” advises Symon.

Risks

Cruising also comes with risks that are beyond the traveller's control. Adverse weather conditions or natural disasters can cause missed ports, cancelled prepaid shore excursions or changes to the sailing schedule.

“Bryte provides cover for missed ports or prepaid shore excursions that cannot be taken, provided the cruise line does not compensate the traveller. Clients often assume that they will automatically be refunded, which is not always the case,” cautions Symon.

Cancellation risk is another key factor. Cruise holidays are typically booked well in advance and involve substantial upfront payments.

“If a traveller falls ill, suffers an injury or experiences a family emergency before departure, cancellation penalties can be severe. Travel insurance helps to recover the

non-refundable portions of cruise fares, flights, accommodation and prepaid excursions, protecting clients from a significant financial loss,” explains Symon.

From a South African perspective, travel logistics add an extra layer of complexity. Most cruises require flights to international ports of embarkation and a delayed or cancelled flight can result in a missed departure.

Delays

“Cruise ships wait for no one. Travel delay and missed connection cover is therefore vital to assist with additional accommodation, alternative travel arrangements or rejoining the cruise at the next port when possible,” says Symon.

Baggage risk is also increased on cruise holidays. Luggage may be delayed en route to embarkation ports or damaged during multiple transitions.

“Insurance provides cover for lost, stolen or delayed baggage, allowing clients



Clients need cover for delayed, damaged or lost baggage.
Photo: Freepik

to replace essentials and continue their holiday with minimal disruption.”

For agents, Symon recommends that the right travel insurance is not just good service but good risk management.

“Clients who cruise without adequate insurance often turn to their travel agent when things go wrong, even

if the issue is outside the agent's control.

“Cruising may feel indulgent and carefree, but the realities of international travel remain. Ensure your clients are protected from the unexpected. Travel insurance is not an optional add-on for a cruise holiday, but an essential part of the booking,” says Symon.

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Nile cruises on the bucket list

CHRISTIAAN SCHULTZ

THOMPSONS Holidays reports it's seeing an increase in demand from South African travellers for Nile River cruises.

Angie Cachao, Thompsons Holidays Product Manager, explains that while Egypt has long featured on travellers' bucket lists, there is a growing shift towards more meaningful, experience-led travel – something that Nile cruises deliver in buckets.

“What we are seeing is people wanting something more immersive and culturally rich, and the Nile offers that in a very structured, comfortable way,” she tells *Travel News*.

Most clients do not book a Nile cruise as a standalone – it's usually part of a bigger Egypt journey.

“The classic combination is Cairo with a Nile cruise between Luxor and Aswan, which works beautifully. We are also seeing more travellers wanting to maximise their trip by adding on destinations like Sharm El-Sheikh or Hurghada. It is a great way to turn one trip into a diverse, once-in-a-lifetime experience,” says Cachao.

Thompsons' most popular packages are seven or ten nights, combining a few nights in Cairo with a three- or five-

night Nile cruise. “It offers a nice balance of sightseeing and downtime as it covers all the must-see highlights.”

From a trade perspective, Thompsons Holidays tries to keep things as seamless as possible – including flights, transfers, guided tours and domestic flights where needed.

“We can advise and consult on the numerous cruise lines and the best itinerary to match the clients' requests and needs. There is growing interest in more luxurious options and private guided experiences for clients who want something a bit more tailored and personal,” says Cachao.



Angie Cachao

Different

She believes the Nile is a completely different experience from a European river cruise – while the European river cruises emphasise a luxurious



The *Sonesta St George* Nile cruise ship's sundeck includes an outdoor swimming pool, a central Jacuzzi and luxurious private cabanas.

ship, local cuisine, wines, museums, galleries and local culture, the Nile cruise is far more about the destination and the well-preserved evidence of its past civilisations.

“It is quite a full-on itinerary, but in the best way – early mornings, guided excursions and a lot of incredible sightseeing. European cruises tend to be more leisurely and scenic, whereas the Nile is all about stepping into ancient history. It is less about relaxing all day on the ship and more about what guests are seeing and experiencing as they immerse themselves in the rich culture and history.”

Drawcards

The history and culture itself are the biggest drawcards. “There's nothing quite like seeing these iconic sites in real life. That said, the convenience is a huge plus – being able to unpack once and move between destinations so easily really appeals to clients. Luxury is becoming more important too, especially

with the newer and upgraded vessels now available on the Nile.”

Improvements

Thompsons Holidays is witnessing a steady improvement in the overall quality of Nile cruise vessels, with more modern, boutique and luxury options coming into the market. “There is also more focus on curated experiences such as private guides, smaller group tours and themed journeys, like the Egypt Solar Eclipse in 2027. This really elevates the overall trip and gives agents more to work with when tailoring itineraries,” she says.

Mainstream

Cachao predicts that Nile River cruises will become more mainstream over time, as travellers move away from purely leisure holidays (lying by a pool or on the beach), and look for more meaningful experiences. “Egypt is naturally becoming more appealing, with better

products, more awareness and strong trade support.”

Advice

For agents, Cachao suggests the most important thing is setting the right expectations. “This is not a typical ‘sit back and relax’ cruise – it is an immersive, guided experience and that is exactly what makes it so special. “There can still be some hesitation around safety and the heat in summer and sometimes confusion around ship standards. But the opportunity is huge – Egypt offers incredible value for money, it's a bucket-list destination and it's a relatively easy sell once clients understand the experience and the elements of creating an itinerary.” Cachao adds that, for South African travellers, it is a special way to connect with history while still travelling comfortably. “When it's packaged properly, it delivers an unforgettable experience every time.”

Silversea's World Cruise opens for pre-booking

SILVERSEA has unveiled its much-anticipated World Cruise 2029, 'A Pacific Awakening'.

It's a 125-day Pacific journey aboard the *Silver Whisper*, sailing from San Diego on January 5, 2029.

This extraordinary voyage will traverse the world's largest ocean, calling at more than 60 destinations across 19 countries, and offering a rare depth of cultural immersion across Polynesia, Micronesia, Melanesia, Australia, Asia and New Zealand.

Pre-booking

Pre-booking is now open, with strong early demand expected for this limited-capacity sailing. South African travellers are encouraged to secure their preferred suite and sailing benefits well in advance.

Experiences

Designed around themes of discovery, heritage and connection, the journey is

divided into eight chapters, each revealing a different facet of the Pacific.

Guests will experience remote island communities, sacred cultural sites, vibrant cities and UNESCO World Heritage landmarks – complemented by 17 overnights and extended stays that allow for deeper exploration.

A highlight of the voyage is Silversea's signature curated events – exclusive, immersive experiences that bring destinations to life. These include a private evening at Honolulu's 'Iolani Palace, a symphony performance in Tasmania, a bespoke island celebration in the Philippines and a grand finale at Thailand's Sanctuary of Truth.

Other benefits for guests will be unique overland experiences, including a complimentary journey to Xi'an with after-hours access to the Terracotta Warriors, as well as S.A.L.T. (Sea and Land Taste) culinary immersions that showcase regional flavours and traditions throughout the voyage.

Aboard

On board, *Silver Whisper* offers an intimate luxury experience with just 392 guests, all-suite accommodation with butler service and a near one-to-one crew-to-guest ratio. This ensures personalised service throughout this once-in-a-lifetime journey. “Cruise Vacations invites travel partners and discerning clients to register their interest and pre-book now to access the best availability, exclusive



Gaynor Neill

insights and expert guidance on this exceptional World Cruise. With extensive experience in luxury and expedition cruising, Cruise Vacations provides tailored support – from selecting the ideal suite and itinerary segment to managing the full travel experience,” says **Gaynor Neill**, CEO of Cruise Vacations, which represents Silversea in the South African market.



Silversea's 2029 World Cruise will end with a grand finale at Thailand's Sanctuary of Truth in Phattaya. Photo: Unsplash, Norbert Braun



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2026 shines for Whitestar

2026 has already been a particularly exciting year says Whitestar Cruise & Travel. It's been marked by strategic portfolio expansion, strong growth in demand for immersive cruise experiences and continued investment in supporting the South African travel trade.

Whitestar says its portfolio is "picked with purpose" – each brand carefully selected to meet distinct traveller needs, travel styles and evolving market demand within South Africa. Whitestar focuses on representing cruise lines that deliver exceptional quality, clear differentiation and strong value for agents and their clients.

New brands

In 2026, Whitestar added Azamara and HX Expeditions, the latest brands to join the portfolio, responding to growing demand for immersive, destination-focused and expedition-style cruising.

"This expansion gives agents scope to confidently match clients with the right cruise experience, from luxury ocean voyages to expedition-led adventures," says Whitestar marketing specialist, **Henuti Purshotam**.

Portfolio

"Our exclusive brands, Cunard, P&O Cruises and VIVA Cruises, remain central to our portfolio. Cunard received significant local attention with the recent visit of the iconic *Queen Mary 2* to South Africa, generating strong interest in classic ocean travel and reaffirming the brand's appeal within the local market," says Purshotam.

"River cruising continues to gain traction, with VIVA Cruises' contemporary European itineraries appealing to guests seeking relaxed, all-inclusive and culturally rich journeys. P&O Cruises offers relaxed yet stylish holidays at sea, combining quality dining,

varied onboard entertainment and a wide choice of destinations, all within a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. P&O represents excellent value for South African travellers, with the added benefit of two ships offering adults-only itineraries," says Purshotam.

"Brands within our portfolio such as Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL), Azamara and Explora Journeys resonate strongly with clients seeking destination-rich itineraries, extended port stays and culturally immersive experiences.

"Seabourn appeals to those clients looking for ultra-luxury cruising, intimate ship environments and highly personalised service, while HX Expeditions caters to the growing appetite for responsible adventure travel and polar exploration.

"Cunard's world voyages, which include port calls in South African waters between January and April each year, offer clients the opportunity



Cunard received a great deal of local attention with the recent visit of the iconic *Queen Mary 2* to Cape Town. Photo: Cunard

to experience Cunard's classic and iconic ships at highly accessible price points. This has driven growth in demand, giving South African travellers the option to cruise to or from Cape Town."

Good value

Low-season offers give good-value opportunities. Pricing is more favourable and clients get to experience destinations out of peak periods, giving them a more authentic experience and the opportunity to explore at a slower pace.

"South African cruise bookings are showing increasing demand for premium experiences, smaller ships, sustainable

travel and flexible booking options, as well as increased interest in longer voyages and once-in-a-lifetime travel experiences. Whitestar continues to adapt by promoting value-added offers, immersive itineraries and brands that prioritise sustainability, enrichment and personalised service while supporting the trade every step of the way," says Purshotam.

"A highlight for the travel trade is the Whitestar Cruise & Travel Win a Car incentive. It was launched in January and runs to November. Every booking earns agents an entry – it's Whitestar's commitment to rewarding agent loyalty."



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Arctic or Antarctic?

TYLIN MOODLEY

THE Arctic and Antarctic stand out as two distinctive cruise offerings that, while often grouped together, deliver very different experiences – each with its own unique blend of landscapes, wildlife and immersive encounters. Both destinations lie firmly in the luxury expedition space, with smaller ships, expert guides, and very inclusive experiences, according to **Gaynor Neill**, CEO of Cruise Vacations. However, the experiences they offer are very different.

North

The Arctic is an ocean surrounded by land, offering a mix of culture, landscapes and wildlife. **Thaybz Khan**, Head of Commercial at Cruises International, points out that the Arctic is more accessible and diverse, while Antarctica is more remote and singular in its focus. From an Arctic perspective, Norwegian fjords, Iceland, and Greenland expeditions remain the strongest performers for Cruises International, with Azamara and Celebrity both offering itineraries in the region. “You’re cruising through regions like Norway, Iceland and Greenland. It feels more varied and, in many cases, it’s a softer entry into expedition cruising. It appeals to travellers who want the expedition element but still value

cultural touchpoints and a slightly more relaxed pace,” said Khan. Said Neill: “In the Arctic, we see strong demand for Svalbard (especially for the Polar bears which shape the experience), as well as Greenland and Iceland combinations. For more seasoned travellers, the Northwest Passage is a big draw,” said Neill. Several cruise lines in the Cruise Vacations portfolio offer Arctic itineraries, namely Silversea, Scenic Eclipse and Swan Hellenic.

South

Antarctica is positioned differently, offering less variety and often marketed as a bucket-list destination. “It’s more about the scale and purity of the environment. The experience is raw, immersive, and entirely destination-led. It is sold as a true bucket-list experience, with the focus on the destination. Wildlife and landscapes take centre stage,” said Khan. Unlike the Arctic, Antarctica is a continent surrounded by ocean. “There are no land predators, so the wildlife is incredibly relaxed around humans. It’s all about ice, silence, and that untouched, once-in-a-lifetime feeling,” said Neill. Expedition teams, guided landings, expedition specialists on board and immersive experiences – these are the core of Antarctic cruises, says Khan. “Ships like *Seabourn Venture* are



Silversea’s *Silver Endeavour* at Neko Harbour in Antarctica.

purpose-built for polar exploration. It combines advanced expedition capability with a refined, ultra-luxury onboard experience allowing guests to access remote environments without compromising on comfort,” said Khan. According to Neill, the most popular of these expeditions in Cruise Vacations’ portfolio is the Antarctic Peninsula, acting as an introduction to the region. Repeat clients, or the more adventurous, favour South Georgia and the Falklands, which are incredible wildlife experiences. Silversea, Scenic Eclipse and Swan Hellenic all offer Antarctic itineraries.

Challenges

The biggest hurdle in selling cruises to these destinations is perception, say the experts. “Clients think it’s going to be too cold, too remote, or too physically demanding. Once you explain the level of comfort on modern expedition ships, that concern usually disappears,” said Neill. Price can also be a factor once currency fluctuations have been taken into consideration.

Cruises International’s approach remains trade-led, working with agents on marketing strategies that shift the conversation from ‘how much does it cost?’ to ‘what am I actually getting?’. From a trade perspective, a few principles make a tangible difference. This is what Cruises International shares with agents:

- Lead the conversation with the experience, not the price – these are once-in-a-lifetime journeys rather than an ordinary cruise.
- Use the comparison with land-based travel at a similar level to contextualise value.
- Simplify the complexity for the client by offering a package for the full journey and understand what the cruise already includes. Some brands provide pre- and post-cruise hotel stays, airport and port transfers, luggage handling, and pre-departure documentation. In expedition destinations, this can extend to onboard expert briefings, expedition gear, and guided landing logistics – all of which simplify the journey and add value for the client.

MSC’s new oasis of tranquillity

THE MSC Group’s Cruise Division will introduce a new luxury private island destination, Sandy Cay, due to open in 2028. The island is adjacent to Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve in The Bahamas. **Quieter** Conceived as an intimate complement to Ocean Cay, Sandy Cay will offer a more secluded, elemental escape,

inviting guests into a quieter, deeply immersive connection with the natural rhythms of the ocean and the spirit of The Bahamas and offering a new dimension of discovery, serenity and escape. Pristine, white, smooth aragonite sands give Sandy Cay its name and its character, shaping an island which will be defined by serenity. In other news from MSC

Cruises, the company recently announced enhancements to Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve, which will introduce new facilities and experiences designed to enhance the offering on the island. **More dining** These include additional island dining venues, new beach concepts for families and adults, expanded relaxation areas, and new ways for guests to engage with marine conservation. Together, these developments reinforce the company’s vision of creating private island destinations that continue to evolve in line with guest expectations while respecting the natural environment and beauty of The Bahamas. With the addition of Sandy Cay, MSC Cruises and Explora Journeys elevate their private

destination offering, creating seamless connections between life on board and experiences ashore. Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve and Sandy Cay together represent the next step in MSC Group’s Cruise Division’s vision of delivering unforgettable holiday experiences combining relaxation, discovery and deep respect for the natural world.



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RCI's Hero to debut in 2027

ROYAL Caribbean has revealed *Hero of the Seas*, its fourth and largest Icon Class ship, arriving in Miami in August 2027.

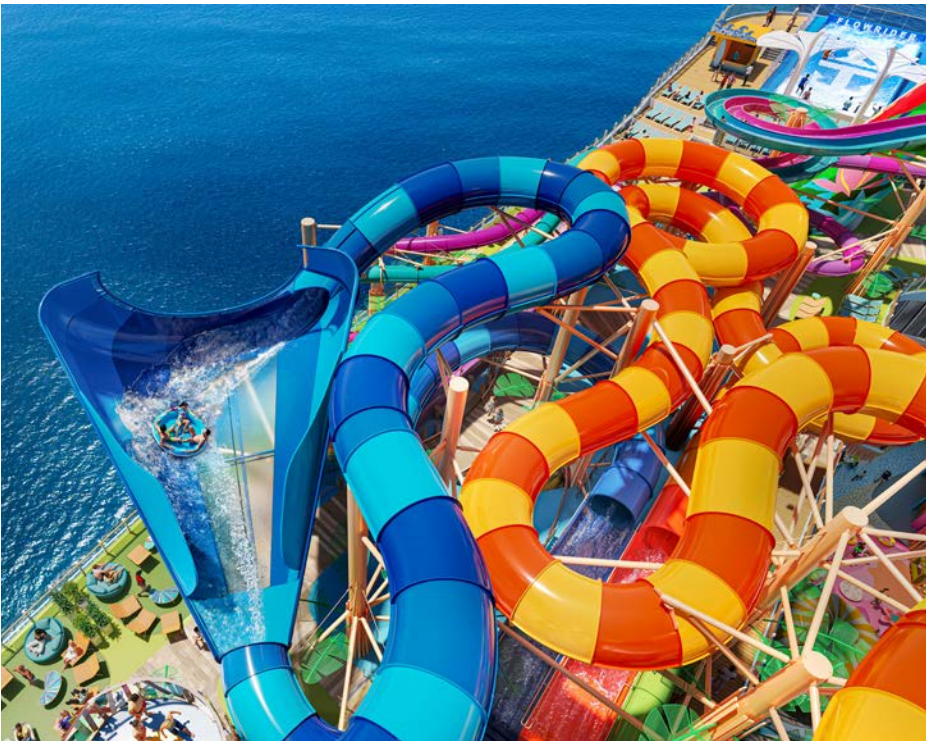
Weighing 250 801 gross tonnes and measuring 365m in length, *Hero* will be the biggest cruise ship at sea when it launches. It has capacity for 5 650 guests at double occupancy and a maximum of 7 600 passengers, plus 2 350 crew.

The ship will take leisure cruisers on seven-night Eastern and Western Caribbean adventures from Miami, with every trip visiting Royal Caribbean's exclusive destination at Perfect Day at CocoCay in The Bahamas.

Guests can choose between week-long Caribbean vacations wandering Western Caribbean spots like Roatan, Honduras, and Cozumel and Costa Maya, Mexico, or explore waters in Eastern Caribbean locales at Philipsburg, St Maarten and Charlotte Amalie, St Thomas.

Splash

Hero will have eight neighbourhoods, all home to remarkable experiences at sea.



Hero of the Seas will offer the first funnel raft slide at sea. Photo: Royal Caribbean

Guests onboard will have a choice of nine swimming pools. Some are in family-friendly spaces, there's a new Caribbean-inspired pool, three adults-only options, plus the largest swim-up bars at sea and more.

Hero will introduce Coconut Cove, an all-new

pool, steps away from the tropical Caribbean bar, The Lime and Coconut. There will also be in-water loungers and poolside service for refreshing drinks.

The adults-only Hideaway will now feature two pools, including the largest swim-up bar at sea and

an in-water DJ booth for nonstop party vibes.

Familiar favourites will be revamped with an expanded Swim & Tonic pool and swim-up bar for adults, plus new water features at Splashaway Bay, the aquapark designed for young kids in the Surfside family neighbourhood.

Dining

The neighbourhoods will offer 28 dining venues. The newest supper club experience, Orleans Parish Supper Club, is a multi-course dining venue with live jazz, craft cocktails and gourmet Cajun and Creole dishes inspired by the French Quarter in the early 20th century.

Royal Railway – Hero Station will be an immersive dining experience that transports adventurous diners by train car to new destinations through a combination of entertainment, food and technology.

The family-friendly Surfside neighbourhood will host hands-on cooking classes in a new venue to be revealed.

The AquaDome Market food hall will return with four new stall concepts, plus desserts at Crème de la Crêpe and freshly squeezed juices at Simply Pressed.

The dining line-up will also include RCI fleet favourites like sushi at Izumi and the walk-up window Izumi in the Park; family-style dishes at Giovanni's Italian Kitchen & Wine Bar, premium steaks at Chops Grille and fresh catches at Hooked Seafood.

Plus, families can refuel throughout the day at grab-and-go spots with everything included, like Basecamp for burgers, El Loco Fresh for Mexican plates and Sorrento's for pizza.

Suites

Hero of the Seas has many family-oriented suites. The Ultimate Family Treehouse is a three-deck treehouse, featuring a rooftop terrace and private whirlpool, a two-deck teen space and two main bedrooms, each with its own bathroom and balcony. Families can also opt for Surfside Family Suites and Family Infinite Ocean View Balconies.

There are also the Royal Loft Suites and Icon Loft Suites for spacious comfort with ocean views. Interior Plus and Sunset Suites also offer comfortable stays.

Adventure

At the largest waterpark at sea – adventurers can take on two new family raft slides, including the first funnel raft slide at sea, along with new twists on the mat-racing Storm Chasers duo.

The truly adventurous can test their courage on Crown's Edge – part skywalk, part zip line experience 47m above the ocean – or catch waves on the FlowRider surf simulator.

Families can challenge one another to friendly competition at the Adrenaline Peak rock-climbing wall, Lost Dunes mini-golf course and sports courts for pickleball, basketball, soccer and more.

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NCL's Luna shows off next-generation design

NORWEGIAN Cruise Line's (NCL) newest ship, *Norwegian Luna*, set sail on its inaugural voyage on April 4. A Prima Plus Class vessel and sister ship to *Norwegian Aqua*, *Luna* brings next-generation design to the Caribbean.

According to NCL Country Manager Africa, **Nirosha Sidat**, *Norwegian Luna* was built with the kind of open-ocean sensibility that turns first-time cruisers into repeat ones.

Norwegian Luna is to sail two distinct seven-day itineraries in the Caribbean from Miami. From April to October the itineraries will include Great Stirrup Cay, the Dominican Republic and Tortola. November and December itineraries take in Harvest Caye, Cozumel and Roatan.

The new ship is also debuting the world's first roller-coaster waterslide, the much-anticipated Aqua Slidecoaster. This dual attraction is billed by NCL as the wildest and fastest ride at sea.

More options

NCL's ships sail worldwide with itineraries in the Caribbean, Asia, the Mediterranean and Alaska. But, according to Sidat,



Nirosha Sidat

long delays in Canadian visa processing have made Alaska a difficult sell for South African passport holders because maritime law requires that Alaska-bound ships sailing from US ports stop at a Canadian port before

sailing onward to Alaska, and this means South African passport holders would need Canadian visas whether they disembark or not.

However, according to Sidat, this situation is benefiting sales to the Med, with many travellers opting to cruise there instead.

Caribbean: *Norwegian Prima* operates a seven-day Caribbean sailing round-trip from Port Canaveral in July, serving the Orlando area and calling at Great Stirrup Cay and St Thomas.

Mediterranean: NCL's 2026 European season runs through October across multiple ships, with a strong emphasis on port-

intensive itineraries and extended time ashore.

Norwegian Dawn sails no-sea-day open-jaw voyages between Barcelona and Lisbon, with late departures from Ibiza and Palma de Mallorca giving clients genuine time to enjoy the islands.

Norwegian Epic operates open-jaw voyages between Barcelona and Rome, calling at Nice/Monaco, Marseille, and Salerno, with extended port time in Livorno for day trips to Florence or Pisa.

Norwegian Gem debuts in Palamós, Spain, before transitioning to no-sea-day voyages between Venice and Rome, calling at Greece, Montenegro and Croatia, with late evening

departures from Dubrovnik on selected sailings.

Norwegian Pearl island-hops through the Greek isles with late departures from Santorini and Mykonos, alternating between Venice and Athens as embarkation ports.

Asia: *Norwegian Jade's* 11-day Japan itinerary in October (Seoul to Tokyo via Osaka, Nagoya, Sakaiminato, and Hakodate) is a compelling option for clients with Asia on their radar.

Added value

NCL's value packages simplify the selling conversation across all itineraries, says Sidat.

Free at Sea includes an unlimited open bar featuring premium spirits, speciality dining meals scaled to sailing length, 150 minutes of Starlink-powered Wi-Fi per guest, and a US\$50 (R815) shore excursion credit.

Free at Sea Plus upgrades to top-shelf spirits, including Patrón Añejo and The Macallan 12-Year-Old, premium wines and champagne by the glass, unlimited Starbucks, and unlimited streaming Wi-Fi.



NCL says the average South African cruiser is experience-driven and has an average spend of about \$3 000 (R49 680). Pictured here is *Norwegian Viva* in Calabria, Italy. Photo: Norwegian Cruise Line

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Insurance



The Venetian Society is Silversea's rewards and recognition programme designed to offer members exclusive access, booking benefits and onboard privileges. Photo: Silversea

Silversea refines loyalty scheme

SILVERSEA has strengthened its Venetian Society loyalty programme.

From July 1, the enhanced programme introduces new milestones, expanded earning opportunities and enriched benefits designed to recognise guests earlier and more meaningfully throughout their journey.

Earning status

The programme remains simple and transparent, with additional ways to accumulate status.

Cruisers earn 1 Venetian Society (VS) Day per cruise day sailed; 1 VS Day per day on Silversea Land programmes and city stays.

To page 16

Oceania reveals transformed ship

OCEANIA Cruises has unveiled *Oceania Aurelia*, billed as ‘The Ultimate Explorer’ and intentionally designed for extended global discoveries.

Debuting in late 2027, the vessel will take to the seas on long, immersive journeys, including the line’s 2028 and 2029 Around the World voyages, as well as a series of expansive Grand Voyages.

Launching as part of the line’s OceaniaNEXT programme (the brand’s all-encompassing initiative at the heart of its commitment to continually enhance the guest experience), the completely reimagined ship, currently sailing as *Oceania Nautica*, represents a new standard for far-reaching, immersive travel.

Aurelia will carry fewer than 500 guests, served by 400 officers and crew.

Travellers will find sophisticated, inviting spaces to relax, connect and unwind as they sail around the globe.



Oceania Aurelia is designed for extended, immersive sailings, including the 2028 and 2029 Around the World voyages and a range of Grand Voyages. Photo: Oceania Cruises

Luxurious suites with dedicated butler service define the onboard experience, with 179 of the ship’s 238 accommodations designed as spacious suites, offering an array of options for world travellers.

Most exceed 28sqm and select suites will span up to 93sqm. Many feature living and dining spaces. The

collection of suites includes remastered Owner’s, Vista and Penthouse Suites, plus new additions such as Oceania Suites, Horizon Suites and a selection of Oceanview and Inside Suites.

Dining aboard *Oceania Aurelia* will be another way to see the world, with menus reflecting the regions being

explored in venues such as The Grand Dining Room, Polo Grill, Toscana, Terrace Café, Waves Grill and the Pizzeria in the evenings.

The line’s coffee venue, Baristas, will move to Horizons and will feature two additions – the Bakery, serving pastries and European specialities, and the Crêperie, where travellers

can enjoy fresh crêpes, waffles and gelato sundaes.

Rounding out the experience are bars and lounges where guests can gather to toast the journey – including mixology experiences at the new Founders Bar.

Extended time at sea invites guests to follow a series of enrichment opportunities, including: the new Chef’s Studio, offering a series of culinary workshops that explore flavour, technique and tradition; Artist Loft, inviting travellers to relax with creative activities; LYNC Digital Center, to connect, create and learn through interactive classes; talks by guest speakers, providing engaging talks on a range of topics; and, for the first time, unlimited access to the Aquamar Spa Terrace for all guests.

Oceania Cruises is represented in South Africa by Cruises International.

Regent adds new ports of call

THE Regent Seven Seas 2027– 2028 season showcases an impressive global collection of itineraries spanning Asia, Europe and the Americas, with a strong focus on immersive, less-known destinations that offer something truly different for clients.

New destinations

Newly introduced ports across the season include destinations such as Yeosu in South Korea, Tokushima in Japan, and Probolinggo in Indonesia. These itineraries will open up unique access to Asia’s rich cultural and natural landscapes.

In Northern Europe, calls to Scrabster and Aberdeen in Scotland, Hamina in Finland, and Greencastle in Ireland add a fresh perspective to this ever-popular region.

The Mediterranean programme continues to evolve with the addition of charming and less-crowded ports including Rovinj in Croatia, Reggio Calabria, Piombino and Savona in Italy, Milos in Greece, and Canakkale in Turkey. These destinations are ideal for clients seeking a more authentic experience away

from the traditional hotspots.

In the Americas, new ports such as Nanaimo in British Columbia, Cabo Rojo in the Dominican Republic, and San Andrés in Colombia further expand the offering.

In the South Pacific, destinations like Alofi in Niue, Vava’u in Tonga, and Port Denarau in Fiji promise remote beauty and cultural richness.

Janine Pretorius, Director of Encore Cruises, which represents Regent Seven Seas in the South African market says: “These carefully selected ports are designed to deliver more ‘off-the-beaten-path’ experiences, whether it’s exploring



Janine Pretorius



Regent Seven Seas has noticed a shift towards more destination focused itineraries, with longer time in port and more immersive experiences. Pictured is Rovinj, Croatia, one of Regent’s new Mediterranean port calls. Photo: Regent Seven Seas

the dramatic volcanic landscapes near Probolinggo or discovering the historic 19th-century architecture of Nanaimo.”

Refreshed fleet

There are several exciting upgrades and innovations across the Regent Seven Seas fleet, adds Pretorius.

Recently *Seven Seas Mariner* and *Seven Seas Voyager* have undergone serious refurbishments. The suites have been upgraded to a more contemporary design. The higher suite categories also now feature

fully redesigned marble bathrooms, bringing them in line with Regent’s newer-generation ships.

On the dining side, one of the most welcome enhancements is the introduction of the Pool Grill. This relaxed dining experience, which includes a casual al fresco pizzeria, gives guests more choice during the day without compromising the overall fine-dining standard onboard.

“Beyond physical upgrades, one of the most important developments is the consistency now seen across

the fleet,” says Pretorius.

“Whether guests sail on an older or newer ship, the onboard experience feels seamless, with the same high standards of service, cuisine, and comfort throughout.”

Looking ahead, anticipation is building around the launch of *Seven Seas Prestige* later this year, which will introduce a new era of design for Regent, featuring even more spacious suites, enhanced public areas, and refined modern touches that continue to push the brand forward.

Cruises embed multi-day land trips

From page 2
One of the itineraries combines a five-night rail journey on the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express with an Aegean sailing. Before departing on the cruise, guests are treated to three nights in a Simplon Historic Cabin, overnight stays and tours in Budapest and Bucharest, a Danube day cruise and a day of rest in Istanbul.

River and sea
Following a sold out season in 2026, Uniworld and Seabourn have expanded their combined ultra-luxury river and ocean cruise offerings for 2027.
The two lines have combined their most popular small-ship itineraries to offer the very best in luxury river and ocean cruising in one cohesive trip, says **Divan Viljoen**, Sales & Marketing Manager for Uniworld Boutique Cruises.
“These packages give

guests the very best of river and ocean cruises combined. Uniworld’s Venice, Veneto and Islands cruise immerses travellers in VIP experiences that include visits to the Doge’s Palace and St Mark’s Basilica.
“Then after a week on the Veneto Lagoon, guests get to relax onboard Seabourn, sailing to stunning small ports across the Mediterranean that larger



Divan Viljoen

ships can’t get to. A full unique package with luxury at its heart.”
Ice and sea
Expedition cruises are now taking travellers into remote territories exploring both North and South Polar regions.
“Expedition cruising, particularly in Antarctica, has evolved far beyond traditional ship-based sightseeing, with brands like HX Expedition giving intensive small-group experiences that bring guests closer to the environment than ever before,” says **Henuti Purshotam**, Marketing & Product Specialist at Whitestar Cruise & Travel.
HX Expeditions’ activity programme offers overnight excursions during which guests kayak quietly through ice floes and past towering icebergs, often encountering wildlife such as seals and penguins in a way that feels



HX Expeditions camps in the Antarctic. Photo: HX Expeditions
completely unobtrusive.
The overnight camping experience in Antarctica sees the guests step ashore in the evening and settle into a simple camp for the night, surrounded by nothing but snow, ice, and the vast Antarctic silence.
A hike is included (weather permitting) in the experience – guided hikes vary from gentle shoreline walks to more advanced explorations, including snowshoeing across untouched terrain.
“Where once the focus was on observing from the ship, today’s travellers are seeking deeper, more hands-on experiences and adventures. The journey becomes far more personal and story-driven,” says Purshotam.
“It’s not luxury in the traditional sense, but rather the privilege of being present. These journeys highlight how far cruising has come. It’s no longer just about where you go, but how deeply you experience it.”



Henuti Purshotam

Silversea refines loyalty scheme

From page 14
As a bonus, solo travellers earn an additional VS Day per cruise day.
Earlier rewards
Silversea introduces new entry-level milestones to reward loyalty sooner.
Guests earn 15 VS Days as an exclusive one-time

welcome offer and 50 VS Days for US\$150 (R2 455) shipboard credit per member on new bookings.
Enhanced benefits
From mid-tier levels onwards, members enjoy increasingly valuable privileges.
Clients with 250 VS Days and above receive

complimentary premium WiFi and priority embarkation, while those with 350 VS Days and above earn a complimentary cruise benefit.
Ongoing benefits across tiers include a 10% booking savings and complimentary laundry and pressing services.
Highlights
Additional programme highlights include new booking benefits for 15 and 50 VS Day members, which are already available on eligible new bookings. Onboard benefits apply to sailings departing from July 1.
Furthermore, Loyalty

Status Match across Royal Caribbean Group brands allows one-to-one tier recognition across Silversea, Celebrity Cruises and Royal Caribbean.
The Points Choice programme also offers flexibility in how loyalty rewards are earned and used. ■

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