

A striking Silhouette

Celebrity Cruises' first domestic sailing in British waters gets top marks from the trade, reports **Samantha Mayling**

dover, Belfast and Liverpool may not have the glamorous cachet of the Caribbean or Mediterranean ports that *Celebrity Silhouette* usually visits, but you'd never know it from the excitement on this six-night sailing around the UK.

Chatting to fellow passengers on our final night, one told me her opinion of Liverpool had been transformed and she couldn't wait to visit again, while another was keen to discover more of Northern Ireland's scenery and history. Even local residents in Kent had uncovered the hidden gems of their home county during excursions from Dover.

The range of tours was impressive, especially considering Dover was a late addition after the ban on Scottish ports. Kent trips featured castles, tea on a steam train and a 'hands-on' experience in Chequers Kitchen. In Belfast, we could see attractions such as the Giant's Causeway or Titanic Belfast museum, while Liverpool featured city walking tours, Beatles experiences and trips to Chester's Roman walls.

The Fab Four theme continued on board with The Beatles Celebration tribute band getting the crowd

singing and dancing – another novel experience amid pandemic restrictions.

Only those who booked excursions were allowed to disembark. We had to stay within our bubbles and wear masks on the coach, but it didn't affect our enjoyment, and our tour guides were equally thrilled to be back hosting trips again after months in lockdown.

ROOM ON BOARD

Inevitably, there were cloudy days, but there was plenty on board to keep us entertained, from motivational talks by former Olympic athlete Derek Redmond to live music, quizzes in the Sky Lounge, tranquillity in the library and sports on TV screens in the new Craft Social bar.

Planning each day was a doddle with the Celebrity app or printed programme of activities delivered to staterooms each night.

When the sun did appear, the socially-distanced loungers quickly filled up with sun worshippers as the cares of the past 16 months melted away.

Passengers told me they booked the cruise for ➤

Celebrity Silhouette
in Southampton

PHOTO: Steve Dunlop

DESTINATIONS

CRUISE | CELEBRITY SILHOUETTE

WHAT'S NEW

✿ The ship's multimillion-pound revamp is part of a \$500 million-plus investment across the fleet.

✿ Cabins and facilities have been refurbished and new attractions added, such as the Craft Social bar and The Retreat – a sun deck and lounge for suite guests, designed by Kelly Hoppen.

✿ The gym has new Peloton bikes, which can be moved into suites for those keen to keep pedalling.

PICTURED: Samantha Mayling (right) enjoys the facilities, entertainment and service on *Celebrity Silhouette*

PICTURES: Steve Dunlop



fast fact

Passengers aged 18-plus must be vaccinated and show a negative PCR test, while those aged two to 17 take an antigen test at the terminal. Celebrity Cruises covers the cost of tests.



a host of reasons, from birthdays and anniversaries to graduations. For many, it was the first time they'd gathered with friends and families since the pandemic hit, while regular guests were keen to book more sailings in search of their 'cruise fix'.

Strictly Come Dancing judge Shirley Ballas was on board too, with her boyfriend and her mother. I'm sure we would all give the cruise a solid 10 out of 10.

TRADE VERDICT

There were about 150 agents and trade partners on board, and those I met were impressed with the ship's multimillion-pound refit.

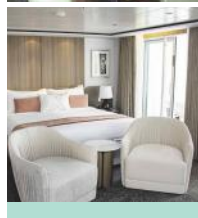
Claire Moore, managing director at Peakes Travel Elite, said: "Agents can get cashflow by selling these cruises now – we are taking bookings for this summer and I am making videos for social media. It is good value, and you don't need to worry about airports."

Margaret Moulton, branch manager at Miles Morgan Travel in Wells, added: "The check-in was very smooth. We can tell clients about that and take the worry away."

Gill Williams, cruise specialist at The Travel Village, won her cruise as part of a Celebrity Moments incentive.

"Our customers really want to get away, even if they just stay on the ship all the time. There's no worry about traffic lights or quarantine," she said.

Celebrity's Jo Rzymowska, EMEA vice-president and managing director, described relationships with trade partners as "really important".



CELEBRITY SILHOUETTE

With 14 dining venues, there's plenty of choice, although you pay extra for speciality restaurants such as Tuscan Grille, Murano, Lawn Club and Q&Sine, which offers 'Le Petit Chef', where augmented-reality 3D characters interact with the meal. Suite guests have exclusive use of restaurant Luminae at The Retreat.

In the Oceanview Cafe, there is a served buffet, while main dining room Grand Cuvee features a two-storey wine tower with 1,643 bottles. Passengers can pre-book mealtimes or show up any time to be seated as soon as a table is available. The Sunset Bar is popular at 'sailaways', as the ship departs each port.

Celebrity's standard fare category, Always Included, provides unlimited drinks from the Classic package, unlimited Wi-Fi and all gratuities. Passengers can upgrade to the Elevate package for \$30 a day or Indulge for \$60 a day.

Book it: A seven-night round-trip cruise from Southampton on August 14, to Inverness (Loch Ness), Belfast and Portland (Dorset), costs £1,199 based on two sharing an Ocean View stateroom. A Liverpool Walking & Beatles tour is priced at £87. Celebrity has added three more UK sailings on September 4, 11 and 18. celebritycruises.com

REVIEWED BY Samantha Mayling

She added: "There is no better way to be able to sell with confidence – seeing is believing."

The line's UK & Ireland sales director, Claire Stirrup, believes domestic cruises offer "phenomenal value" when the range of facilities and services are taken into account. "There are lots of selling points for travel agents," she said.

Andy Harmer, UK & Ireland director of trade body Clia, also hailed the opportunities to attract new-to-cruise as well as regular guests. "The investment by lines in domestic cruises demonstrates the long-term commitment to the UK as a destination and a source market," he said. **TW**