



# Learn to earn

**There's no lack of training opportunities in the cruise market, says Jane Archer**

**I**t's hard to imagine rock band Pink Floyd and the cruise industry have much in common - unless you were at the Clia UK & Ireland's river cruise convention in Amsterdam last November.

As "we don't need no education" blared out, Phil Nuttall, managing director of The Cruise Village, took to the stage and showed the results of a test that illustrated many delegates in the room had no idea where Europe's rivers are. He said: "This is the

fastest-growing sector of cruise, but also the least understood. If we are to succeed in this sector, we all need educating."

Nuttall was talking about river cruising, but the message applies across the sector. Agents who do not understand it or do not know the different ships on offer, who they appeal to and how to sell them, cannot hope to build their cruise sales.


There is no excuse for ignorance. In addition to the

product, sales and destination training Clia offers alongside conferences and ship visits, cruise lines and ancillary companies invest time and money ensuring agents know about their products through face-to-face and online instruction - all provided free - as well as fam trips and dedicated training teams.

Regent Seven Seas Cruises, for instance, has recently appointed a new training and events manager, Dee Smith, to help

raise awareness of the brand. She says: "Agents need to understand Regent and what sets us apart, but equally, I need to understand what they want, so I can deliver the right training."

Cruising Excursions bolstered its agent training last month with the appointment of Michelle Burge to the new position of travel trade training manager.

Royal Caribbean International UK and Ireland sales director Ben Bouldin says agents are key 





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## DESTINATIONS TRAINING CRUISE



➔ to attracting new-to-cruise customers, so its Cruising for Excellence training scheme is continually reviewed to ensure it meets their needs.

More than 12,000 agents have completed the training – Bouldin said that is a requirement of working with Royal Caribbean – which is built around module-based lessons in a ‘real-life’ environment. By the end of the course, which has recently been updated to work on mobiles and tablets, agents should have learned about Royal’s ships through virtual tours, be familiar with the places they visit and have picked up sales tips.

Developing a training programme that engages agents is vital, according to Voyages

to Antiquity managing director Jos Dewing. The company’s new scheme, built in-house and launched in September, uses words, video and pictures to educate agents about the product and its clients (see panel, p79).

Dewing says the number taking the training passed the year-end target of 250 by early December, and he now wants to assess its impact on bookings. He adds: “Agents have told us they really enjoyed the training, so I have high hopes it will make a difference.”

### HEI HOPES

Viking Cruises launched a training scheme on November 1, as part of a trade awareness programme prompted partly by a realisation that an existing scheme was ➔



TOP LEFT: The Cruise Village’s Phill Nuffall

TOP RIGHT: Royal Caribbean’s Ben Bouldin

LEFT: Viking Cruises’ new trade magazine



→ not working, but also by the need to educate agents about the company's new ocean product.

The revamped training – one course for rivers, one for oceans – features on a new trade website, [madefortrade.co.uk](http://madefortrade.co.uk), that also hosts competitions, quizzes and marketing resources. To complement the site, a new trade magazine, *Hei* (Norwegian for 'Hi'), filled with news, selling tips and interviews, is being distributed to about 12,000 agents. The next issue is out at the end of this month.

Head of sales Neil Barclay says about 55% of Viking's bookings come through the trade. "Some agents sell a phenomenal number of river cruises, but others still don't understand it," he adds. "There is a mindset that the cabins are small, and a lack of destination knowledge that we have to get through."

More than 1,000 agents had completed the river or ocean course by mid-December (some have finished both) and been recognised as an Official Viking Expert. "The river and ocean products complement each other, and agents who find a client who likes the one can be sure they will like the other," says Barclay. "It's all about education."


While most cruise companies have a strong foothold in the trade, Tauck UK and Ireland country



### Viking Cruises' trade magazine, *Hei*, with news and selling tips, is being distributed to about 12,000 agents

manager Ray Steward has the task of building agent sales from scratch. Since opening a UK office 18 months ago, he has focused on introducing agents to the brand. Now he's moving the training from 'who' to 'how', with more focus on product and how to sell it.

This year, Tauck will host two complimentary two-night events at The Langham hotel in London, each for up to 50 agents. They will feature a day of product and sales training, followed by a morning of meetings to discuss marketing opportunities.

Steward accepts that it's a costly venue, but says the aim is to give agents the same experience as its clients enjoy (Tauck uses The Langham when passengers have an overnight in London), so they can appreciate what makes the company different. On the second evening of the training, there will be a 'Tauck event', as there often is on the company's river cruises. 

## Who offers what?

**AmaWaterways:** Training is offered through Truly Independent Professional Travel Organisation sessions, webinars or face-to-face meetings and an agent guide to selling. Fam trip rates of £500 a person cruise-only are available within 60 days of travel for those who want to experience the product for themselves.

**Celebrity Cruises:** Modules that educate agents about the company's Suite Class, its new Abu Dhabi cruises and Jet Set Sail private charter programme have been launched on Celebrity's online Cruising for Excellence training programme. A Where in the World Wednesday feature, giving agents three clues to identify a location, has been created to make destination learning more fun. Celebrity also offers training via face-to-face sessions and ship visits that allow agents to experience the vessels as if they were guests, for instance by taking a dip in the pool or enjoying a meal in Qsine.

**Fred Olsen Cruise Lines:** An online Travel Agent Centre (TAC) will host training modules that have been updated to make agents more aware of the company's concept of bringing the world closer to customers through regional departures and specialised itineraries such as river cruises on its ocean-going ships. TAC is set to launch this spring. Fred Olsen also hosts up to 150 agents a year on educationals, and arranges ship visits during UK port turnarounds for up to 50 agents at a time.

**Holland America Line:** Modular training delves into the history of Holland America, its ships and the places they visit, and explains the concept of its premium cruising. There are also sales tips and exams at the end of each course, to reinforce the training.

**Seabourn:** The Seabourn Academy comprises six modules that educate agents about the product and destinations, as well as focusing on understanding luxury clients. New for 2016 are port visits to *Seabourn Quest* during its Celtic Quest cruise around England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales from Dover. Group fam trips are rare but agents keen to go onboard can request friends and family rates.

**Voyages to Antiquity:** A new training programme has five modules split into sections that educate agents about the product, ship and clients via words, video and pictures, as well as a short multiple-choice test. Once agents have completed them all, they become a Voyages to Antiquity 'luminary', and enjoy early access to offers and fam trips. Agents achieving luminary status by the end of this month will go into a prize draw to win £100.

