

# Single- minded

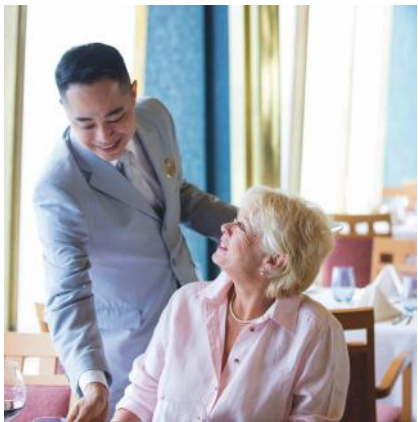


A growing number of cruises are accessible and affordable for solo travellers. Plus, they can offer friendship and fun, finds **Jeannine Williamson**

It's 11.15am in the Observatory Lounge high up on Fred Olsen Cruise Lines' ship *Bolette*. Glasses of sparkling wine are being clinked and there's a palpable air of excitement as gentle Atlantic waves scud past. Many people are already deep in conversation as cruise director Anthony Cranny beckons me to a seat. It's hard to believe we set sail only the previous

night and that most of the group of 30 or so have never met before.

"I started my career at sea as a solo traveller and [technically] all the crew are solo travellers, so you're not alone," he tells the meet-and-greet session before outlining the events for singles. Many other solos know the ropes, so they skip the meeting and do their own mingling over the coming days. ➤



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Bolette in port; dinner in the Colours & Tastes restaurant; dolphin watching; enjoying the friendly atmosphere

PICTURES: Fred Olsen Cruise Lines; Shutterstock/Doris Oberfrank-List

### FUN AND GAMES

As well as dedicated singles events – including afternoon tea, dining in Bolette’s two speciality restaurants, joining tables with other single travellers in the main dining room and meeting up before ports of call for anyone who wants to buddy up and explore together – he encourages us to have a go at general activities.

“Deck games are great for camaraderie,” he says. “There are people who had never tried curling before for example, and the next thing you know, they are back on a cruise together.”

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines prides itself on a friendly onboard atmosphere, making it an ideal line to recommend to solo clients, whether they live alone or have a partner who doesn’t fancy a cruise.

### SHORE ACTIVITIES

Our 12-night Wonders & Wildlife of the Azores & Madeira round-trip from Southampton is a mix of leisurely sea days, where members of the Orca

“Some of my energetic shipmates head off on a walk along Madeira’s distinctive stone irrigation channels, while others visit the tropical gardens

charity host whale and dolphin watching from deck, and calls at ports such as Funchal, where it’s hard to choose between the host of solo-friendly shore tours on offer. Some of my energetic shipmates head off on a picturesque walk along Madeira’s distinctive stone irrigation channels, while others opt to visit the tropical gardens.

Back on board, there’s no shortage of things to do in a busy daily programme that starts with 7am gym classes and sometimes ends in the early hours with a silent disco. In between there are classical concerts, a book club, bridge and ukulele lessons, art classes, dance sessions and talks.

### SAFE AND SOUND

Jean Coker from Portsmouth caught the travel bug on a school trip that took her to destinations including Madeira, Casablanca and Lisbon. Like many fellow passengers, she started cruising with her late husband. Having sailed on various lines, Jean says she returned to Fred Olsen after being widowed –



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Cologne; Norwegian Cruise Line's Studio Lounge on *Encore*; Riviera Travel's *Geoffrey Chaucer*, relaxing on board PICTURES: Shutterstock/S.Borisov, SvetikovaV

and was moved when a cabin steward remembered her and her husband from several years before. Since then, she has clocked up 574 sea nights with the line, sails on an average of five cruises a year and has 10 booked through to 2025, including a 24-night cruise to destinations including Cape Town.

"A cruise is really good if you're single," she says. "It's safe and you get to meet all sorts of different people. When you start doing more cruises, you see people you've met before who are also travelling on their own. It's sociable and I like doing things such as going to the shows. The crew is always wonderful – they remember you every time you come back."

**JOB SATISFACTION**

I catch up with Anthony again at the end of the sailing and he says there are often about 80 to 90 solos on a sailing. "I will meet a passenger on their first cruise and next time I see them, they're on board with people they previously met playing shuffleboard," he says. "This is one of the most satisfying parts of

my job. Solo passengers are important to Fred Olsen, so we are constantly looking at what we do. On this cruise, we trialled a port day meeting point where people can meet and chat about what they've done during the day, and the things they'd recommend if they came back, and that went well."

As Anthony waves goodbye to the solo passengers, he knows it's more than likely he'll see many of them again. **TW**

**BOOK IT**

**Fred Olsen Cruise Lines'** 13-night Islands of the Azores Crossing the Path of the Solar Eclipse itinerary on *Bolette* starts at £4,799 for a single stateroom, departing April 4, 2024. Calling at St Malo, Brest, Praia da Vitoria, Ponta Delgada, Funchal and Leixoes, the round-trip from Southampton includes a viewing of the solar eclipse and whale spotting led by experts from the marine conservation charity Orca. [fredolsencruises.com](http://fredolsencruises.com)



FOR SOLO TRAVELLERS

**Riviera Travel** offers dedicated sailings for single travellers with no supplements on any cabin categories, including suites. The seven-night **Rhine and Moselle River Cruise for Solo Travellers** starts at £1,929 for a standard cabin, departing November 1 on *Geoffrey Chaucer*. The round-trip from Cologne calls at Cochem, Trier, Bernkastel, Koblenz, Boppard and Rudesheim. Fares include flights, transfers, excursions and Wi-Fi. [rivieratravel.co.uk](http://rivieratravel.co.uk)

**Norwegian Cruise Line** was the first ocean line to introduce cabins and public areas for single cruisers. A six-night **Caribbean: Barbados, Antigua & Saint Lucia** sailing on board *Norwegian Viva* starts at £1,676 in a studio stateroom, on a cruise-only basis, departing on January 7, 2024. The round-trip from San Juan calls at Tortola, St John's, Bridgetown, Castries, Philipsburg and St Thomas. [ncl.com/uk](http://ncl.com/uk)

**Emerald Cruises** has single cabins on most of its Star Ships. A single cabin on the seven-night **Tulips & the Rhine** cruise on *Emerald Sky* leads in at £2,395, departing April 6, 2024. The itinerary, which starts in Basel and finishes in Amsterdam, includes a visit to one of the world's largest flower gardens, Keukenhof. Fares include flights, transfers and drinks with meals. [emeraldcruiises.co.uk](http://emeraldcruiises.co.uk)