

Points mean prizes

They turned up at the airport ready to be whisked away to a Destination Unknown – but where did this hotly anticipated incentive trip take 12 lucky agents? Rhodri Andrews reports



Agents and suppliers enjoy sightseeing by bike in Celebration, Florida

Disney didn't design this place with running in mind, I thought, as I

sprinted through the quaint Kissimmee town of Celebration in the wake of a group of travel agents solving the latest clues in a scavenger hunt.

First opened in the 1990s, Celebration was Disney's vision of an idyllic American small town, with a sleepy pace of life – but not today.

"I've got to find the answers to 14 clues in the next 45 minutes," said Matt Phillips from Travel Chaps, before rushing off to begin his search.

Matt was one of 12 lucky agents who'd won a place on Destination Unknown, an agent incentive trip jointly hosted by Virgin Atlantic, Royal Caribbean International and Celebrity Cruises, in partnership with Travel Weekly. They'd earned their spots through the brands'

respective rewards programmes: Virgin's Sky High Club, My Club Royal and Celebrity Rewards.

This was no ordinary fam trip, though. The agents had no idea where they were going – and even when they did arrive in Florida, they were faced with a series of fun challenges to score points and win a host of prizes.

They might not have known Celebration before the trip, but after a few hours' racing around, they'd seen plenty of its red-brick roads, palm-lined streets and crayon-coloured storefronts.

"Do you know where the Christmas shop is?" asked Charlie Blaydon from Iglu Cruise. I didn't – but that eagerness to uncover the quirky spots around town was a sign of things to come.

HOT COMPETITION

Rewind 24 hours and the agents had arrived early at Manchester airport, the air heavy with anticipation. They ➤

AGENTS' *views*



Sarah Hart,
Hays Travel

"I knew

Kissimmee was

on the doorstep of the major theme parks but I didn't realise how much else there was to do, from bike rides and quirky museums to airboat excursions and pretty towns. It's a fantastic place for families."



Sam Griffiths,
Cruise1st

"Clients might worry about

feeling crammed in on a ship the size of *Icon of the Seas* but I can now see they don't need to. The designers have done a superb job of maximising passenger flow and ensuring guests can navigate it easily."



Katie Longstaff,
Cruise118

"I've been on

a couple of Celebrity cruises, but with *Beyond's* larger size, I really noticed how much more space you get, as well as the luxury and attention to detail you'd expect. It's an ideal ship for couples who want to do as much or as little as they like."



Lavinia Chew,
Hays Travel

"Virgin

Atlantic's

premium economy cabin is a step up, with priority boarding, extra legroom, upgraded meals and that added layer of luxury. I felt far more relaxed after boarding – the extra space and quieter ambience makes it a little more special."



were greeted in style at private terminal Aether, more often frequented by celebrities and luxury travellers.

As details filtered through, the excitement began to build – and by the time we'd reached Kissimmee, everyone was firmly in game mode. The first scavenger hunt began in the entertainment district of Sunset Walk in Margaritaville, as a series of photo challenges came thick and fast via cryptic messages from a certain 'Agent Unknown'.

One minute I found Tim Harden from Harden Holidays snapping a photo of himself in a classic British phone box; the next, I spotted Vidya Kesavan from IntelTravel trying to discover how far Cancún was from Sunset Walk.

The pace picked up as we explored Kissimmee – first in Disney-built Celebration, then among the shops and restaurants of Disney Springs and finally by answering trivia about the 2,000-plus cars on display at entertainment hub Dezerland Park. As agents racked up points, it became tight at the top of the leaderboard. The only thing hotter than the competition was the weather itself, as temperatures soared above 30C.

FLORIDA FUN

That's not to say the competition was always full throttle. Strategic pauses allowed the agents to catch their breath and to explore sun-drenched corners of Kissimmee, with a leisurely bike ride through sleepy Celebration and its leafy surroundings, as well as an airboat ride in the

"As keen as the competition had been, everyone was cheering for each other – and all considered themselves winners

Everglades in search of alligators and great blue herons. It was a welcome reminder that Kissimmee is not only suitable for theme park fans and families but also for couples and friends looking for outdoor activities.

After a busy day cracking clues, the agents retreated to their luxury villa in Encore Resort at Reunion – somewhere that would also work well as a base for clients. "The size of these villas, with a large kitchen and a bathroom for every bedroom, mean they are ideal for multigenerational families," said Leanne Rudd from Travel Counsellors. "And they are close to the theme parks."

With the Kissimmee challenges completed, it was time for Destination Unknown to move to a new location. The anticipation quickly built as the agents recharged on the three-and-a-half hour Brightline train journey from Orlando to the next destination: Miami.

ROYAL VISIT

With many of the finalists being cruise specialists, the next chapter of Destination Unknown brought them to more-familiar surroundings.

PICTURED FROM FAR LEFT: (top) *Celebrity Beyond*; agents enjoy an airboat ride in Kissimmee; Cruise 118's Katie Longstaff reads her favourite trade magazine on Florida's Brightline train; Harden Holidays' Tim Harden fulfils a photo stop at Sunset Walk, Kissimmee; Encore resort at Reunion; Cruise 1st's Sam Griffiths in *Icon of the Seas*' Izumi restaurant; the agents with Virgin Atlantic staff at Manchester's private Aether terminal; Hays Travel's Lavinia Chew poses with Duelling Pianos staff **PICTURE:** Greg Wilson; KT Watson; Rhodri Andrews; Blue Juice



First up was Royal Caribbean's *Icon of the Seas*, which launched in 2022 and is the world's biggest cruise ship. Many of the participants knew of *Icon* already, but Agent Unknown's tasks were designed to ensure they not only visited key places on the ship, but also used some creative thinking to showcase it at its best.

That's what prompted Lavinia Chew from Hays Travel to get the staff from the Duelling Pianos bar involved in her photo challenge, while Sam Griffiths from Cruise 1st snacked on Japanese food at the ship's Izumi restaurant for his.

Once the tasks were ticked off, there was downtime at Thrill Island, with some of the agents choosing to sip Miami Vice cocktails in the pool while others took on the slides of its water park, Category 6.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

As the Destination Unknown trip drew to a close, the agents had one final heat to play – on *Celebrity Beyond*. Compared with the family

fun on board *Icon*, *Beyond* offered a more laid-back vibe – something welcomed by the energy-sapped agents in their final push for points.

Agent Unknown had one last trick up its sleeve, however, with a series of anagrams and photo challenges to keep the agents' creative juices flowing. As ever, they were up to the task, with Gemma Larder from Cruise.co.uk capturing pictures in a hammock chair at the oasis-like Eden bar and a trio of agents photographing themselves in one of the ship's champagne coupe-shaped hot tubs.

The agents spent their last night enjoying the delicious Asian food of KYU Miami. And as everyone realised this was their last chance to climb the leaderboard, the excitement was higher than ever.

Yet as keen as the competition had been, everyone was cheering for each other as well as themselves – a sign that no matter the outcome of this epic Destination Unknown adventure, they all considered themselves winners. **TW**

HOW TO MAKE CRUISE-AND-STAY PAY



Sarah Graham, senior account manager, Virgin Atlantic

"Cruise-and-stay holidays give customers the best of both worlds: excellent experiences on land and luxury at sea – with us in the sky delivering the magic every step of the way. It's the kind of holiday that ticks every box. With the tools, training and the Sky High Club rewards programme, agents have everything they need to seal the deal."



Matt Stuart, strategic account manager, Celebrity Cruises

"It's a fantastic way to add value to a trip. We know there are customers who don't want to choose one or the other, so combining land and sea into a longer itinerary really makes sense. They get local cultural immersion, then you get all the curated packages, shore excursions and onboard entertainment with us on one of our award-winning cruises."



Aaron Langford, senior sales director, UK and Ireland, Royal Caribbean International

"Cruise-and-stay holidays are an excellent way to attract new-to-cruise holidaymakers. For example, we know millions of UK families want to travel to Orlando for the theme parks, so a cruise is the perfect way to build on this, whether it's aboard our *Utopia of the Seas* ship or upcoming *Icon Class* vessel *Star of the Seas*."