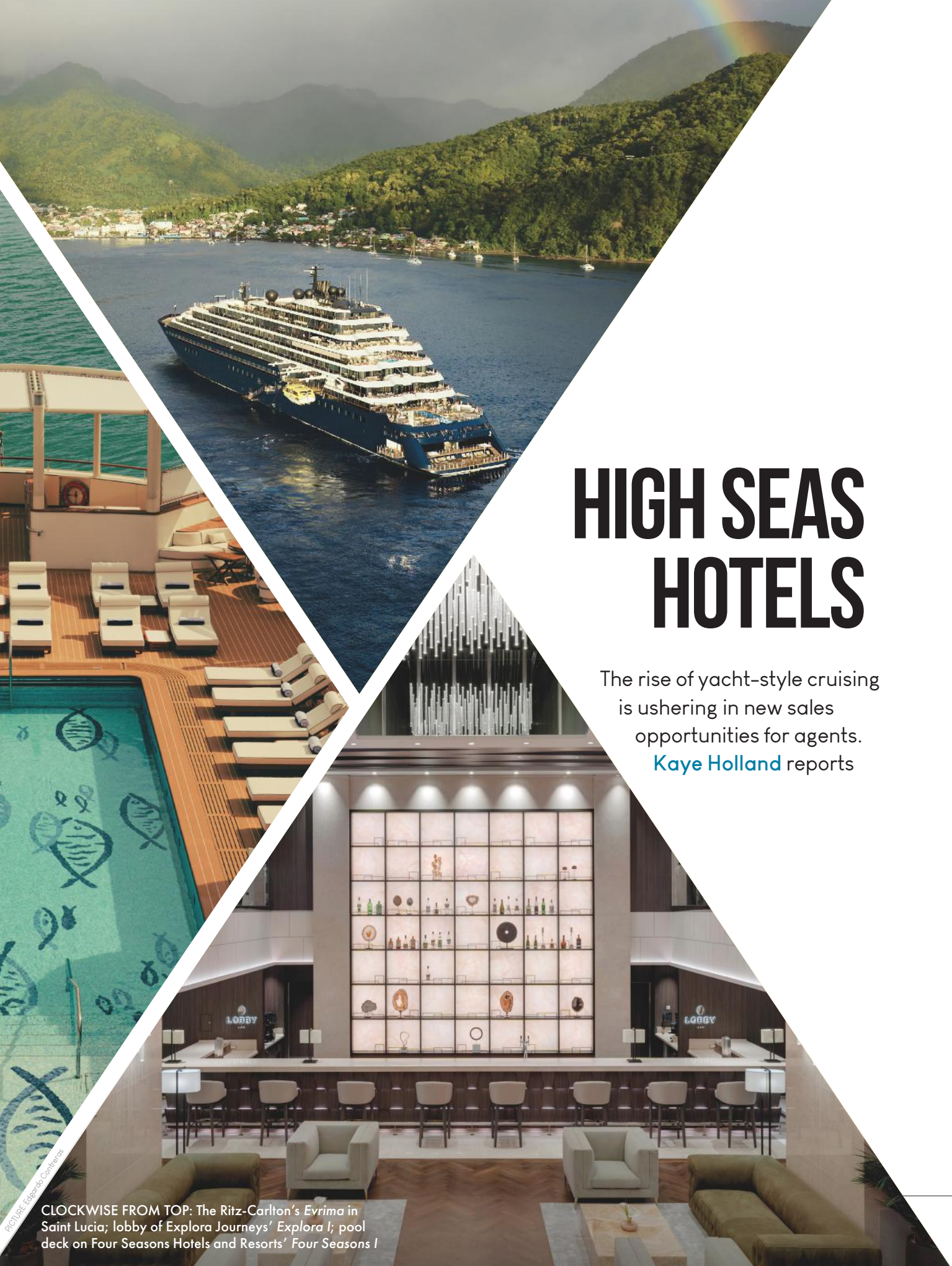




HIGH SEAS HOTELS

The rise of yacht-style cruising is ushering in new sales opportunities for agents.

[Kaye Holland](#) reports

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The Ritz-Carlton's *Evrima* in Saint Lucia; lobby of Explora Journeys' *Explora I*; pool deck on Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts' *Four Seasons I*

Demand for cruises is booming as holidaymakers take to the high seas in record numbers. The number of UK and Ireland cruise travellers hit a new high of more than 2.5 million last year, based on data from Clia's ocean cruise line members, out of more than 37 million globally.

So it's no surprise luxury hotel groups want in on the action, with several of the world's most renowned brands floating out a string of sumptuous ships – sorry, superyachts – and more on the way.

The Ritz-Carlton was the first to take a luxury hotel name to the water. Inspired by the sleek design of private yachts, the 298-passenger *Evrima* set sail in October 2022. The 448-passenger *Ilma* followed in 2024 and 453-guest *Luminara* last summer.

On board, guests can admire art by Picasso, Warhol and Hockney and dine on dishes created by chefs with Michelin-starred restaurants, before retiring to their suite to bathe in Diptyque toiletries or sleep in enormous beds lined with Frette linen.

Yes, the high-end hospitality brand has taken the best bits of its hotels and resorts – a sophisticated aesthetic, first-class service and superlative restaurants – and put them on the water.

YACHT'S NEW?

Hot on the heels of The Ritz-Carlton is Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, which is investing a cool £1 billion to build three 190-passenger superyachts.

The first, *Four Seasons I* – complete with huge four-storey suites and a swimming pool that turns into a dance floor – began sailing in the Med this spring with Insta-famous captain Kate McCue at the helm.

It's a trend that hasn't escaped cruise retailers. Jack Bennett, Iglu Cruise's luxury cruise commercial manager, says: "Over the past two years, we have focused on yachts and yacht-style cruising, and have seen serious interest



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"Our customers ask about the service and staff ratios, the easy access to smaller ports and the number of guests per ship. There is also significant curiosity about the watersports facilities.

"It's a sector we predict will only grow – and profitably – over the coming years."

BRANDS AT SEA

Next on the horizon is Accor. The hospitality giant is launching the world's largest sailing yacht, the 220m *Corinthian*, in June. The first of two on order, the 108-passenger vessel will feature 54 suites, food by French chef Yannick Alléno, eight bars including a 1930s-style speakeasy, a 115-seat cabaret theatre, recording studio, Guerlain spa and cinema.

Then in 2027, Aman Resorts takes its turn with the 183m yacht *Amangati* – meaning 'peaceful motion' in Sanskrit. Its 94 fortunate guests will enjoy a Japanese garden, 16m pool deck and two helipads.

Elsewhere, Explora Journeys – the ultra-luxury offshoot from MSC Cruises – has designed its fleet to look and feel more like intimate, luxurious private yachts rather than traditional cruise ships. The company even drafted in veteran British yacht designer Martin Francis to create the elegant, aquiline profile of *Explora I* and *II*, with ships *III* to *VI* set to follow by 2028.

The line is also challenging traditional cruise conventions through the choice of terminology it employs: Explora uses the word 'guests' rather than

'passengers', 'hosts' instead of 'crew' and 'experiences' rather than 'excursions'.

Atlas Ocean Voyages, Scenic, Emerald and SeaDream are other outfits that have leaned in to this style of cruising by launching vessels they term 'yachts', owing to their emphasis on personalised service with plenty of space, fine dining and onboard watersports equipment.

Such experiences couldn't be further from the reputation of mainstream ocean cruising as floating resorts replete with rollercoasters, water parks and vast buffets, which is good news for the industry, according to Andy Harmer, managing director at Clia UK & Ireland.

"Yachts and yacht-style cruising highlight the rich diversity of experiences available in the cruise sector today, from intimate small-ship voyages to traditional ocean cruising," says Harmer.

"What's particularly exciting is the opportunity this creates for agents to engage a different type of customer and often those who may not have previously considered a cruise holiday. The smaller scale, flexibility and immersive nature of yacht-style experiences can help open the door to a new audience."

SELLING TIPS

When selling this style of cruising, Harmer adds: "The key is to emphasise the different destinations, personalised service and the boutique feel on board, while positioning yacht-style cruising as part of a wider spectrum of holidays at sea.

"Last year, we [Clia] hosted our first dedicated event focused solely on small-ship and yacht-style cruising, and it continues to be a major feature across our training, webinars and online content, so I urge agents to take advantage of these."

One caveat for travel professionals: the glossy hotel brands carefully avoid using the c-word so, whatever you do, don't go calling *Evrima*, *Amangati* or *Corinthian* a cruise ship... ●