



Rocky Mountaineer

Perfect pair

Four industry experts signal the merits of combining a rail journey with a voyage on the water. **Adam Shaw** reports

Whether it's sailing the Med before stepping onto the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express or taking in Costa Rica and Lima by small ship before hopping on Belmond's Hiram Bingham from Cusco to Machu Picchu, there are plenty of ways to combine a cruise with a rail journey.

Rail trips are becoming a popular addition to a cruise – Imagine Cruising recently launched six exclusive rail and sail tours for 2024, after its 2023 programme sold out – while operators are busy adding new product. This year, APT is reintroducing its rail and sail packages in New Zealand and Canada for the first time since the pandemic, while Uniworld has unveiled a package taking in the Maharajas' Express trip and a Ganges sailing. We asked four operators how agents can capitalise on the growing popularity of rail and sail.

'STRESS THAT RAIL AND SAIL IS ALL ABOUT THE JOURNEY'

Brad Bennetts, head of sales and business development, APT Travel Group

Brad has worked for the APT and Travelmarvel



brands since June 2022, following stints at easyJet Holidays and Kuoni. He is responsible for identifying and developing growth opportunities and driving sales for the luxury river cruise, small-ship cruising and touring offerings.

"Agents need to fully understand their customers' motivations and purposes for travel before selling a rail and sail holiday. This travel style offers a slower pace, and the itineraries can be a little longer than other road-based options, so it's not always appropriate for a guest who wants to cram in as much as possible.

"But it is the perfect option for holidaymakers who want to slow down, relax and immerse themselves in the scenery.

"Rail and sail itineraries are not about getting you from A to B as fast as possible, but about weaving the journey into the fabric of the experience.

And integrating a cruise allows customers to enjoy the destination's coastline as well as its interior.

"Operators seek to create, and agents to sell, the most immersive, appealing and authentic travel experiences possible for our customers. That includes the modes of ➤



ABOVE: Star Clipper and Star Flyer. Fred Holidays pairs a Star Clippers sailing with the Hiram Bingham train to Machu Picchu in Peru

transport they will experience, and rail and sail itineraries guarantee that guests are travelling in the most scenic, comfortable or value-adding ways. When the journey itself is as pleasurable as each destination visited, guest satisfaction, loyalty and repeat custom are pretty much guaranteed."

'CONSIDER ADD-ONS TO HELP THINGS RUN AS SMOOTHLY AS POSSIBLE'



Sally Hauser, product and sales manager, Fred Holidays
Sally has been working in travel for more than 20

years, spending nearly nine years at Leger Holidays, before finding herself in the rail holiday sector. She says the breadth of train travel and cruise product available to Fred Holidays means it can create a range of rail and sail packages.

“We find [carrying] bags is the number-one thing that people complain about, so I’d recommend booking a luggage service if it’s an option

“There are many different types of rail and sail. We do everything from a Seine river cruise, where you just hop on the Eurostar, to really different packages, like the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express or the Hiram Bingham to Machu Picchu combined with the Star Clippers ships – these are really, really popular.

“We’re also working with AmaWaterways on a brand-new Colombian river cruise along the Magdalena, which we’ll partner with Machu Picchu – it’s unique.

“Book with people who have done their homework. Experts will know what to expect when it comes to timings and different experiences in different parts of the world.

“If there’s a luggage service available, I would certainly book

it. We can arrange for bags to be taken from your house to your cruise ship, then clients can just take a smaller bag for the train journey and they don’t have to worry about it.

“This is probably the biggest thing that puts people off booking. We find it’s the number-one thing that people complain about, so I’d recommend booking a luggage service if it’s an option.

“And be mindful of mobility. Not all trains will be suitable for people who have mobility issues, and they can vary in quality, so be sure to consider that when putting an itinerary together.

“And when it comes to the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, advise customers to book early, because it sells out really quickly.”

'HIGHLIGHT THE VALUE OF CRUISE AND RAIL TO YOUR CUSTOMERS'



Connie Georgiou, sales director, UK, Ireland, Middle East and Africa, Silversea

Connie has been in the travel industry all her working life, since her first position at Thomas Cook and then Avis Budget Group. She joined Silversea Cruises in 2016 and is responsible for driving sales and trade relationships.

“We find it works well to twin our cruises with an amazing land package and that could be a really lovely rail journey such as the Venice Simplon in the Med, the Rocky Mountaineer in North America or even trains to and from Machu Picchu.

“If you’re going all that way, people like the mix ➤

DESTINATIONS

CRUISE | RAIL AND SAIL



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Silversea Cruises' *Silver Dawn*; spa on *Silver Dawn*; Maharajas' Express, India; Uniworld's *La Venezia* PICTURES: Filippo Vinardi; Uniworld River Cruises



of the two. So it's about showing guests how they can make the most of their journey, and often a great way to enhance the overall experience is to combine a cruise with a train package.

"Because of the all-inclusive price on these packages, agents earn a generous commission. And by adding a rail package to the cruise, agents have a great opportunity to increase their commission too – rail and sail is definitely a way to earn more.

"Plus, if you look at what's included on an ultra-luxury cruise, it's amazing value. If you break down the value into per day, you can see how much clients get: once they're on board, they don't have to get their wallet out."

'A RAIL AND SAIL ITINERARY CAN HELP YOU REACH A DIFFERENT TYPE OF CUSTOMER'



Angela Sloan, head of UK sales, Uniworld

Angela joined the Uniworld team four years ago as a key account manager. She was previously head of product and commercial at World Travel Holdings, and prior to that held roles at Scenic and Emerald, Thomas Cook and Bourne Leisure.

"Remember that river cruise and rail clients are very similar in many ways, so there is huge opportunity to cross-sell or combine the two. River cruising and

“Along the Ganges, you'll see people waving as the ship goes past, and every stop on the train or entry into a new hotel involves a proper welcome

rail holidays share the same benefits – you unpack once and enjoy a really relaxing way to travel, getting you into the heart of destinations and along routes where the view is always changing.

"But they may well appeal to escorted touring customers too – travellers who are culturally curious and want to see the sights, but also want all the details taken care of. Our cruise and rail itineraries have something for everyone, and they are a wonderful way to get under the skin of the destination while being looked after every step of the way, at the very highest level.

"On our cruise and rail departures, we have a dedicated carriage for Uniworld guests where the offering reflects that of our ships, so guests can expect to see their favourite dishes and Uniworld's famous levels of service on board the train as well as the ship.

"India is new for 2023, and – in response to customer demand – we are hopeful of being able to add more Uniworld-exclusive departures on the Maharajas' Express, teaming that with our Golden Triangle & The Sacred Ganges sailing.

"There is something incredible about the warmth of the Indian people and the welcome guests receive. All along the Ganges, you'll see people waving as the ship goes past, and every stop on the train or entry into a new hotel involves a proper welcome – the red carpet is rolled out and there is often a band playing. Guests are received as real VIPs." TW