

# RIVERS RISING

With Celebrity Cruises moving into the river market, can agents make more of cross-selling between ocean and river, asks **Kaye Holland**

**One of the world's most popular ocean cruise lines recently announced plans to expand into river cruising. Celebrity Cruises has ordered 10 river ships, with sailings scheduled to start in 2027.**

President Laura Hodges Bethge says: "Our market research shows that more than half of our guests are either interested in or have already experienced a river cruise. Our customers represent our 'north star' and, guided by their feedback, we continue to develop products that meet their vacation needs."

Celebrity isn't the first brand to branch out into river cruising – many agents will remember the old-school Crystal Cruises launching *Crystal Mozart* in 2016, followed by four new-builds, before sailing into choppy financial waters in 2020. Now, Crystal's new owner, Abercrombie & Kent, is heading to the Amazon in June, while Silversea president Bert Hernandez says an expansion into river cruising would be a "natural evolution for the brand".

## CROSS-SELL TO CLIENTS

Agents have welcomed the moves. Paul Hunter, head of product at Cruise1st, expects to see "more ocean cruise lines moving into river" and believes Celebrity's new venture could help seal the deal with clients who are unsure about booking a river cruise. He says: "Agents will be able to cross-

sell to ocean guests and emphasise that Celebrity's river ships will offer the same familiar and stylish experience."

The fresh design approach of Celebrity's Edge Class vessels, which feature contemporary interiors by Kelly Hoppen and exceptional service levels, will help challenge the perception of river cruising as the preserve of retirees, according to Paul Frost, head of tour operations at Iglu Cruise.

He says: "Celebrity's entrance should attract a younger crowd to the river sector, and the fact that children will be allowed on board will appeal to families and the multigeneration market too."

## SMALL SHIP, BIG OPPORTUNITY

The gap between ocean and river cruising – formerly very distinct types of travel experience – is certainly shrinking, as illustrated by APT's plans to introduce "ocean-style" entertainment to its river ships in 2025.

Paul Melinis, UK and Ireland managing director, says: "Guests can enjoy mobile phone photography courses, stargazing experiences, sustainability workshops and movies under the stars on our eight-day Highlights of the Danube sailings."

With a new breed of river ships that tap into some of the big selling points of ocean vessels – but with no tenders or long port transfers – agents have an opportunity to branch out beyond their usual cruise clientele. ●

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