



SOLO SELLERS

There's been a boom in travellers wanting to explore the world alone, but how is the cruise industry responding to this rise?

[Kaye Holland](#) reports

PICTURES: Frank/Kaiser Cruise.co.uk; Vivieragon Cruise Line

Riviera Travel's *George Eliot*, exclusive to solos from June 2027; left and above: solo cruisers enjoy time aboard and ashore

Dangerous, daunting and ever so slightly strange... solo travel was once considered the preserve of young, often male, hostel-hopping backpackers on a budget. Not anymore.

Fast-forward to 2025, and more people of all ages, genders and backgrounds are opting to strike out solo – with many choosing a cruise over a land-based break.

Make no mistake: a recent survey of more than 8,000 customers by online travel agencies Cruise.co.uk and Seascanner found that independent travellers now make up 5% of the cruise market.

Tony Andrews, managing director of Cruise.co.uk, says: “We’re seeing more solo travellers embracing the cruise experience, and it’s clear that affordability and the destinations visited are key drivers for this market.”

SOLO SPECIAL

The appetite for solo cruising is there, but the question remains: is the cruise industry stepping up to meet the needs of this growing demographic?

River cruise operator Riviera Travel is already adapting. From June 2027, the Burton-based company will dedicate an entire ship, *George Eliot*, to solo travellers.

The 132-passenger vessel will offer weekly solo-exclusive sailings on the Rhine, Danube and Moselle rivers as well as two 14-night itineraries – Budapest to the Black Sea and Cruise the Heart of Europe – which Riviera Travel says will be its longest solo river cruises to date.

The move comes after the line reported a 66% year-on-year rise in solo river cruise bookings, with independent travellers making up nearly 13% of bookings.

“The launch of *George Eliot* as a dedicated solo ship perfectly reflects this momentum,” says Vicky Billing,

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Riviera Travel’s director of trade and partnerships for the UK & Ireland.

Phil Hullah, chief executive of Riviera Travel, calls it “a landmark moment” for the company and the entire river cruise industry. He adds: “The launch of *George Eliot*, the first river cruise ship to operate exclusively for solo guests, allows us to offer independent travellers a choice and focus that no other operator provides.”

EARLY ADOPTERS

Elsewhere, Norwegian Cruise Line has long leaned into the solo-friendly narrative, having launched solo ‘studio’ cabins and accompanying studio lounges for single travellers on board *Norwegian Epic* back in 2010.

Today, the line offers nearly 1,000 solo staterooms across its 20-ship fleet. NCL president Harry Sommer says: “We are listening to our guests to deliver the experience they want. After realising the growing demand of individuals looking to travel on their own, we have now expanded single occupancy staterooms across our fleet.”

One of the biggest barriers to solo cruising is cost. If dedicated solo cabins such as NCL’s have sold out, solo travellers may be slapped with a punitive single supplement – often 50%-100% of the fare.

To sidestep the dreaded ‘single tax’ when travelling alone and avoid paying a premium, Laura Clark, marketing director at Iglu Cruise, advises: “Book early, often two to three years in advance, for solo cabins. Alternatively, wait until the last minute [when empty double-occupancy cabins are offered without a single supplement].”

VALUE AND VARIETY

Despite the challenges of pricing, Andy Harmer, managing director of Clia UK and Ireland, believes cruising is a type of holiday where solo travellers – regardless of whether they are single or simply seeking a break from work and family – are well catered for, with many opportunities to meet other solos.

“Cruise offers exceptional value and inclusivity, removing many of the logistical challenges and safety concerns that can come with travelling alone,” says Harmer. “Dedicated solo cabins, hosted events and social dining options help make it an even more welcoming and engaging choice.”

To this end, he urges agents to capitalise on the trend for solo travel and make the most of the opportunity to reach a growing audience of customers who may not have previously considered a holiday at sea.

“With the right advice and product knowledge, agents can play a vital role in matching solo travellers with itineraries and ships that ideally suit their needs,” Harmer adds.

While there remains room for growth in the industry, as an increasing number of lines design ships, itineraries and experiences with solo travellers in mind, solo cruise travel will surely continue to soar. ●