

ASK THE operator

As demand rises for no-fly cruises, **Adam Shaw** asks three experts why these sailings work particularly well for Spain and Portugal

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La Sagrada Família, Barcelona

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Praia da Vitória, the Azores

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Jerónimos Monastery, Lisbon

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1 'It's the best way to visit beaches and rich coastal cities'

Ruth has responsibility for travel agent sales revenue, engagement, training, events, communications and sales support. With the recent introduction of *Arvia* and *Iona*, Ruth and her team are passionate about growing existing travel agent partnerships and developing new ones.



Ruth Venn
director of sales, P&O Cruises

“Cruises that depart from the UK are certainly becoming more attractive for guests who want a relaxing way to start and end their holiday, with no luggage limits, no transfers and the ability to turn up at the cruise terminal, park their car and have their bags taken straight up to their cabin so they can start their holiday straight away.

Travelling to Spain and Portugal by sea is the perfect way to see the region and its spectacular coastline. It allows visits to small fishing villages, local markets and sandy beaches, and its ports offer a gateway to architecturally rich coastal cities such as Cartagena with its Roman amphitheatre, or Valencia and its bustling pavement cafes serving plentiful paella.

And it doesn't mean sacrificing evenings enjoying the local food or nightlife as many P&O Cruises holidays to the region offer an overnight stay in cities such as Lisbon and Barcelona.

One of my favourite places in the region is Lisbon's Belém, where you can spend a morning wandering around the tranquil grounds of the Unesco World Heritage-listed Jerónimos Monastery, followed by a visit to the famous Pastéis de Belém, which offers delicious Portuguese custard tarts – even more perfect when they're accompanied by a hot coffee – before exploring more of the city's treasures.

2 'Perfect for clients who can't or don't want to fly'

Charlotte has been field sales manager for the UK and Ireland since May 2022. Her day-to-day role includes ensuring maximum engagement with frontline agents and increasing their knowledge and brand awareness of Celebrity Cruises.



Charlotte Hallam
field sales manager, Celebrity Cruises

“No-fly is a big part of our business, and we're finding it is the cruise holiday of choice for many UK cruise passengers this year. We saw guests booking early for 2023, but we've also seen a significant shift towards demand for lates for May and June, which is when our Spain and Portugal itineraries are.

A benefit of cruising is that there's no luggage allowance – you can take as much as you like. Not everyone is able to fly – there might be medical reasons, for example – so cruising allows these clients to see Spain and Portugal without getting on an aircraft.

There are so many different places to visit in Spain, including beach breaks to the likes of the Canary Islands, but also cities such as Barcelona and Seville.

The Canaries are popular with people looking for late summer sun, particularly around September and October. Itineraries are normally 11 nights, usually with a stop-off in Porto, before a couple of days to get out to the islands and a return via Vigo, where it feels more like entering a vast fjord than a Mediterranean harbour.

We also do overnight stays in Porto, so guests can experience it both day and night and really immerse themselves in the destination.

3 'No-fly cruising is a great way to visit the Azores'

Geoff joined Fred Olsen Cruise Lines as head of sales in May 2019, having previously held the role of head of cruise at Fred Olsen Travel. He has been at the Fred Olsen Group for 22 years, including working as reception manager across the Fred Olsen Cruise Lines fleet.



Geoff Ridgeon
head of sales, Fred Olsen Cruise Lines

“Sailing from the UK is a hassle-free way of travelling; you can start your holiday the moment you reach the port. We've seen year-on-year increases in demand for no-fly cruises, and a 50% increase in January 2023 (compared with January 2020) from those who haven't sailed with us before.

Spain is ideal for shorter breaks. You can go on five-night sailings from the UK, which is a great way to try a cruise for the first time.

You're looking at one or two days of sailing to reach Spain and Portugal, depending on where you're departing from in the UK. But that gives you the opportunity to enjoy the onboard experiences, whether that be sunbathing or learning about the places you're about to visit through our destination talks and cooking demos.

Cruising is also a great way to visit the Portuguese islands of the Azores. They're one of the best destinations in Europe for whale and dolphin watching, and you've got the opportunity to witness landscapes that are best viewed from the water. In Lisbon, ships can sail underneath the Ponte 25 de Abril Bridge, which crosses the Tagus River, and pass the 16th-century Belém Tower, a Unesco World Heritage Site that was built to defend the city. There's a huge amount of historical and cultural experiences you can have on a sailing.