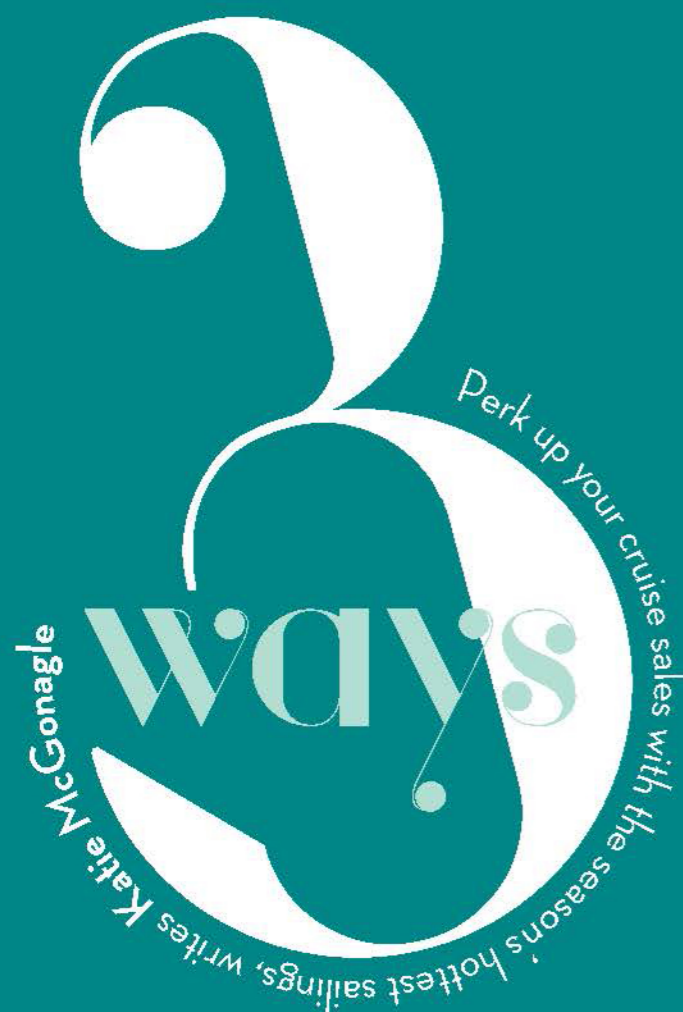


SUMMER CRUISES



Cruise travellers are renowned for planning ahead, stacking up one sailing after another, sometimes years in advance, so they can have first pick of their favourite ships and preferred staterooms - and can disembark knowing they have another adventure to look forward to.

But for every client who's ready to book the moment itineraries go on sale, there's another looking for a last-minute escape. They might be cruise devotees keen to squeeze in an

extra departure, or new-to-cruisers willing to swap their usual resort holiday for a floating hotel, tempted by the great-value fares and onboard facilities.

That's certainly the case this year, with several lines reporting record sales during the latest wave period for departures this year and further ahead. If you're looking for last-minute inspiration, we speak to a handful of lines that have seen bookings soar to find out which destinations, itineraries and ships are sure to keep your cruise sales sizzling this summer.



Sailing from the UK keeps costs lower, eliminating the need for flights, airport hotels or transfers. It's also a budget-friendly way to explore destinations such as Norway - renowned for its relatively high prices ashore - by combining coastal scenery and pretty port cities with good-value dining, drinks, entertainment and kids' clubs back on board.

While winter is popular for the northern lights, summertime in the fjords means biking and kayaking, hiking to the top of Pulpit Rock and riding the famous Flám Railway.

It's already a summer bestseller for MSC Cruises, which reported its "strongest week ever" for sales in January, led by bookings of short ex-UK cruises departing in May and June.

Steve Williams, UK and Ireland sales director, says: "For 2024, itineraries to the Norwegian fjords and the Mediterranean from Southampton on board MSC Virtuosa are proving extremely popular. Sales in MSC Yacht Club are also going very well as customers enjoy the exclusivity of a first-class cabin, 24-hour butler

service and private dining options.

"Wave was very strong for us and 2024 has been selling well - we are seeing sales exceeding those of 2023, and 2025 is looking like it will be even stronger. We've just launched 2026 sales from Southampton and our phones have been ringing non-stop."

Book it: A seven-night Norwegian Fjords cruise on MSC Virtuosa, round-trip from Southampton, calling at Haugesund, Måløy, Flám and Kristiansand, departing on August 24, starts from £899 per person. msccruises.co.uk

The Mediterranean remains the top choice for summer sun, but with resort prices rising as quickly as the temperatures during last year's heatwave, the winning combination of an ocean breeze, guaranteed sea views and affordable dining and drinks makes cruising an increasingly attractive way to explore the region.

Clients can sample the sights in classic hotspots such as Barcelona, Cannes, Rome or Dubrovnik, while incorporating smaller ports of call such as Valencia (the Green Capital of Europe for 2024) or the Sicilian city of Messina along the way.

Ruth Venn, director of sales for P&O Cruises, says: "This summer we are seeing huge demand for

our ex-Southampton and fly-cruise Mediterranean itineraries, as well as the Norwegian fjords. There is also huge interest in our newest ship Arvia, which is sailing longer 14-night Mediterranean itineraries for the entire summer season, giving guests plenty of time to experience everything the ship has to offer.

"These itineraries were our biggest sellers during the 2024 wave period and we are delighted with how well they have continued to sell."

The line has also added more capacity for kids on Arvia during school-holiday sailings from Southampton, with four-berth fares for price-conscious families; alongside fly-cruise itineraries on Azura, which is operating seven-

night and 14-night departures from Valletta until October.

Venn says value for money was the key sales driver during the wave period, and it's not too late to advertise offers for this summer. Guests can get additional onboard credit on 'Select Price' sailings booked by June 4, plus 10% off Classic drinks packages.

Book it: A 14-night Mediterranean sailing on Arvia starts from £1,029 for an inside cabin or £1,599 for a balcony, based on a June 9 departure from Southampton, with the option of a 10% discount on Classic drinks packages (when purchased at the time of booking) and additional onboard spending. pacruises.com

Spend



Arvia's infinity pool

Splurge



Silver Nova

HOT SHIPS FOR summer

Sun Princess: Princess Cruises' first Sphere-class ship is spending its maiden summer season in the western Mediterranean and Greek isles. It will even make a call at Southampton in September, as the line operates its biggest-ever season of ex-UK cruises, featuring *Sky Princess*, *Regal Princess* and *Caribbean Princess*.

Queen Anne: Cunard's newest addition will be sailing from Southampton to northern Europe, the Norwegian fjords and the western Mediterranean this summer, after a naming ceremony in Liverpool on June 3.

Celebrity Apex: Celebrity Cruises is homeporting its Edge-class ship in Southampton in 2024 and 2025, with four-night to 13-night sailings to Scandinavia and the Med between May and October. EMEA managing director and vice-president Giles Hawke said the ship was in the line's top two best-sold this year, proving even more popular than its previous UK flagship, *Celebrity Silhouette*.

Summer bookings are buoyant at the upper end of the market too, with luxury cruisers still looking for the value and ease of a holiday at sea, but with the high-end dining, larger suites and butler service expected of smaller ships.

For Silversea Cruises, which saw its best-ever week for sales in the UK in February, the top-selling spots this year have been the Med, Alaska and (for winter departures) the Caribbean.

Peter Shanks, managing director for the UK, Ireland, Middle East and Africa, says: "These three destinations have always

“Cruising is the ideal way to explore Alaska’s Inside Passage and spot humpback whales

been popular for British guests. Silversea tends to focus on the smaller, unique ports where we are benefitting from people wanting to stay away from mainstream ports.

“Alaska is set to be a popular choice this summer and we have *Silver Nova* there on her inaugural Alaska season. There is

no better ship to see that magical destination.”

Alaska cruises run from May until September, with the shoulder months offering fewer crowds on shore, while peak June and July sailings provide more daylight hours and the best chance of bear sightings. Whatever the departure date, cruising is the ideal way to explore Alaska’s Inside Passage, spot humpback whales or capture the Hubbard Glacier on camera.

Excursions available with Silversea include helicopter flightseeing over glacier peaks, dog-sledding on the icefields and a chance to board an Alaskan crab

fishing boat for the day. For those who prefer to soak up the scenery and explore the area’s port towns and gold rush history under their own steam, the line has introduced ‘Essential Fares’ for departures within the next four to five months, which provide cruise-only prices without airfares or shore excursions.

Book it: Silversea Cruises offers a seven-day Alaska cruise from Vancouver to Seward departing June 6, with prices from £3,950 (Essential, not including flights or shore excursions) or from £6,800 (Door-to-door, including flights, transfers and shore excursions).

[silversea.com](https://www.silversea.com) 