

# Party like it's 1989

Who needs a muddy field when you can get your festival fix at sea? **Rebecca Barnes** reports

**I**n true rock 'n' roll style, pop heartthrob Tony Hadley is on stage knocking back Jack Daniels. His excitable banter indicates he's having as good a time as the audience, who are dressed as iconic 1980s characters – anything from children's performers to Freddie Mercury and *Hi-De-Hi* yellowcoats – while singing along to Spandau Ballet's hits.

This is a typical scene on Floating Festivals' Throwback. The previous night, Nathan Moore from boy band Brother Beyond had started off singing on stage and ended up freestyling in various parts of the packed room.

Royal Caribbean's 3,400-passenger *Explorer of the Seas* has been sprinkled with 1980s fairy dust for the weekend and nostalgia is definitely on the itinerary. We're cruising round-trip from Southampton to

Le Havre, but rather untypically, the key attractions are to be found onboard and not ashore. And while all of the ship's excellent facilities are available, the passengers are creating their own entertainment.

The party atmosphere is intoxicating and you quickly get used to the unexpected becoming the norm – a nine-foot Incredible Hulk knocking back pina colodas at the bar, downing shots in the lift and being showered with glitter on a dancefloor decked out with inflatable space hoppers and Rubik's cubes.

As you might expect, this sailing is strictly for lovers of the idiosyncratic era that bought us mullets, mixtapes and shoulder pads. The decade's music caters for all tastes and the headline acts are proof of this – reggae-pop group UB40, disco divas Sister Sledge and Tony Hadley perform to enthusiastic crowds in the Palace Theatre each evening. ➤





**TONY HADLEY  
SPANDAU BALLET**

**Q.** What do you think of the Throwback festival?

**A.** Everyone is lovely and here to have fun. There's great food and drink, stacks of entertainment and you don't have to worry about getting home. It's all on your doorstep, then you go to bed and the next morning, you start all over again!

**Q.** What's your favourite part of the ship?

**A.** The theatre is incredible. I still get a kick out of music, so being on board is as much fun for me as for the customers.

**Q.** What's it like walking around knowing people are here to see you?

**A.** If I had a pound for every time someone said, "Can I have a selfie?", I'd be a wealthy man. I don't want to shut myself away, I want to get involved and hang out with my mates.

**Q.** What are your favourite destinations?

**A.** Mauritius, as it's where I met my wife, but I also love Los Angeles, New York, Rome and Venice. We often rent a villa in the hills of Majorca, with only a goat or a donkey around. I've not been to India or China yet, but I'd love to go.

**Q.** What's the one thing you can't cruise without?

**A.** My washbag – it's got the hairspray, razors, deodorant and aftershave. You've got to keep up standards, haven't you?



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Fancy dress is the order of the day; Tony Hadley; revellers enjoy Throwback PICTURES: Floating Festivals

But unlike those often untouchable 1980s heroes, this time round you just might find yourself dining next to resident DJ Pat Sharp or squeezing into the lift with comedy legend Bobby Davro.

**FESTIVAL FUN**

The theme nights – Freestyle, Neon, and Music and Film – are taken seriously by the mainly British crowd, who go all out to be creative and original. The drinking starts early and it seems that everyone is here to have as much fun as possible.

With 1980s tunes playing throughout the ship all day long, it's a real party atmosphere – and anything goes.

Along with the Club Tropicana disco, the promenade is one of the liveliest parts of the ship for drinking and socialising, and surprises pop up everywhere and at any time, including dining room flash mobs, elevator karaoke and Star Wars characters at breakfast.

Now in its second year, Throwback is gaining momentum among regular cruisers and those who've never set foot on a ship.

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average age is early to mid-50s, but the decade was so strong for music that we also have fans in their 20s, and some in their 60s and 70s. You'll find that Throwback tends to sell itself, thanks to our line-ups.

“We've invested heavily in the concept and now have lots of loyal fans, as well as some great high-profile acts talking to us who would never have previously dreamt of performing on a cruise ship.”

With more than 700 rooms already sold for October's festival, music lovers will need to move fast if they want to join the most fun and flamboyant party at sea. **TW**

Floating Festivals chief executive Jonathan Blackburn says: “It's introducing people to cruise who normally wouldn't consider it. Our

**BOOK IT**

Floating Festivals offers 10% commission to agents, who must sign up to its booking portal to check prices and availability. Throwback – the Ultimate Festival at Sea takes place onboard Royal Caribbean's *Anthem of the Seas* from October 1-4, with cruise-only fares from £599, including entertainment and meals for a round-trip sailing from Southampton to Cherbourg. A deluxe drinks package costs £55 a day. This year's line-up features Martin Kemp, The Jacksons and Gok Wan. Floating Festivals also has a Jane McDonald cruise (September 20-27) and Stages – the Musical Theatre Festival at Sea (September 27-October 1), which starts at £699 and will feature West End stars including John Barrowman and Bonnie Langford. [floatingfestivals.rezmagic.com](http://floatingfestivals.rezmagic.com)