



Your questions answered

Tackle your clients' cruise questions with answers from the lines themselves, writes **Katie McGonagle**

There's never been a tougher time to be a cruise agent. With lines pushing back plans to resume sailings, and consumer sentiment in the doldrums, agents face an uphill climb to rebuild confidence in the sector.

Yet it's also never been more important to be ready with the answers when customers call, keener than ever for the advice and expertise of their trusted travel agent, whether they're looking to rebook a cancelled sailing or seeking reassurance that their cruise holiday will still be worth taking once departures resume.

Those conversations are undoubtedly challenging, so to help you answer your clients' questions, we've canvassed some of the key lines for their latest advice. Many are still hard at work and unable to offer full details of their revised plans as yet, but stay tuned to *Travel Weekly* for all the up-to-date information you need to reassure your clients and restart sales.

Q. My client's cruise was cancelled – what will happen to my commission?

A. Lynn Narraway, managing director, UK and Ireland, Seabourn: "Travel partners are vital to our business and we really appreciate all the efforts you are making to encourage guests to rebook any Seabourn cruises we have, regrettably, had

to cancel. If a client chooses a full refund on their cancelled cruise (and the payment has been made in full), agency base commission is protected. If the client chooses a future cruise credit (FCC), then the travel agent will receive base commission on both the existing booking (if paid in full), and the future reservation, where the FCC is redeemed at 100%. Our Early Bonus Savings promotion gives clients 10% off the base cruise fare on select 2021 cruises, when they pay in full by July 31. This means agents benefit by earning their commission early, upon full payment. Perhaps most importantly, we are offering agents a 4% bonus (on base commission) for any new 2021 Europe, Alaska, Canada and New England cruises booked by July 31. Take out an allocation of suites on any of these sailings and you can also boost commission by up to a further 5%."

Q. What if my client wants to cancel their 2020 sailing?

A. Peter Shanks, managing director, UK, Ireland, Middle East and Africa, Silversea Cruises: "Guests can cancel up to 48 hours prior for 2020 sailings. Plus, we are only asking for a deposit of £750 for new bookings, and when paid in full that is turned into a \$1,000 onboard credit. As a huge ➤



top tip

Scenic has launched its 2021 Europe programme, adding cooking classes and foodie sailings in France, plus the option to change dates or itinerary up to 90 days before departure



ABOVE: Entrance to the Manor nightclub on Virgin Voyages' *Scarlet Lady* FACING PAGE: (from top left): Scenic *Sapphire* in Avignon, France; Royal Suite on a Uniworld ship; *Crystal Symphony* in Antarctica

WHAT ABOUT...?

INSURANCE

Kevin McMullan, head of product, Saga Health and Travel Insurance: "You have to be confident protection is in place for all eventualities while you're away, and that's why we've put Covid-19 cover into our travel insurance policies. If you fall ill with Covid while abroad, we'll help with the medical costs and get you back home. This covers all Saga travel insurance customers, whether your cover is part of a holiday booked through us, or through standalone insurance."

FUTURE CRUISE CREDIT

Lynn Narraway, managing director, UK and Ireland, Holland America Line: "We've launched a short-term cancellation policy as part of our Book With Confidence campaign, for cruises departing up to December 31, 2021. Those who have had full-paid sailings cancelled will receive 125% of the cost in Future Cruise Credit, which is valid for a year for sailings up to December 31, 2022. Those who had not paid in full will receive Future Cruise Credit to the value of double the deposit paid. Alternatively, guests can request a 100% refund."

RESTORING CONFIDENCE

Adolfo Perez, senior vice-president of trade sales and marketing, Carnival Cruise Line: "During our voluntary pause in operations, we have been engaging with experts, government officials and stakeholders on additional protocols to protect the health and safety of our guests, crew and the communities we serve. It's important that travel advisors are very familiar with those changes as we announce them, so they can continue their vital role as ambassadors for our industry."

SMALL SHIPS

Torstein Hagen, founder, Viking Cruises: "We are committed to maintaining the safest and healthiest fleet in the industry and are now developing additional protocols to make travelling with Viking even safer."

sign of our support for travel agents, Silversea is protecting commission on both cancelled bookings and Future Cruise Credits, and we are proud to be supporting our valued partners in such a meaningful way in these challenging times."

Q. My client doesn't want to travel this year – what can I book for 2021 and beyond?

A. Chris Townson, UK managing director, Uniworld: "Based on increased interest for 2021, we launched our 2021 preview collection earlier than usual, and our advice to agents and their clients is to book early to secure the cruise, date and room category that they want, because with pent-up demand and rebookings from this year, we expect capacity to be quite tight. Our full programme is available to book now, including Peru, which is new for us, and of course we have a number of new Super Ships on the Douro, Nile, Venice lagoon and the Mekong, so it will be an exciting time to sail with us."

A. Elaine Gillard, UK marketing director, Crystal Cruises: "We're delighted to offer more than three full years of global itineraries. For ocean, we currently have 2020, 2021 and 2022 on sale, as well as our 2023 World Cruise and *Crystal Serenity's* 2023 itineraries. *Crystal Symphony's* 2023 itineraries will be announced in July and on sale soon after. *Crystal Esprit's* itineraries are on sale up to Q1 2023, while anyone wanting to cruise Europe's rivers can book departures up to 2022."

Q. How can I reassure my clients about onboard hygiene?

A. Lucia Rowe, managing director, UK and Ireland, A-Rosa River Cruises: "Health and hygiene measures being put in place for our restart include social distancing protocols for the entire ship, enhanced cleaning procedures, the wearing of mouth and nose coverings in public spaces, pre-screening and temperature checks prior to embarkation, meals served

Our ships are already equipped with an air system that ensures cabins and public spaces are refreshed with separate air supplies

at tables at set times, and excursion participant numbers being reduced. A-Rosa ships are already equipped with an air refreshment system that ensures cabins and public spaces operate using separate air supplies."

A. Richard Fain, chairman and chief executive, Royal Caribbean International: "We are working on a Healthy Return to Service programme with four main focuses: upgraded screening prior to boarding, enhanced processes onboard, focus on the destinations we visit and procedures for dealing

with exceptions. It is tempting to start talking now about the individual components. However, we're still taking guidance from our expert advisers. One thing that won't change is our determination that we will not start operations until we are fully ready to do so with all the hygiene and health protocols solidly in place."

Q. What if my clients don't want to fly to their embarkation point?

A. Geoff Ridgeon, head of sales, Fred Olsen Cruise Lines: "The majority of our sailings are ex-UK, operating from Southampton, Dover, Newcastle, Liverpool and Rosyth in Edinburgh throughout the year. This includes British Isles cruises, but we are also seeing demand for people travelling abroad next year – over a third of all searched-for cruises on our website in the past month have been in the Mediterranean, followed by Baltic and Arctic cruises. We have seen a significant year-on-year increase in bookings for 2021,

which shows consumer confidence is growing again and people are excited about cruising next year."

A. Anthony Daniels, general manager, UK and Ireland, Hurtigruten: "We understand that for many people, flying may not be an option for some time. That's why we are pleased to offer four adventurous itineraries departing from Dover from March 2021, and since announcing them, we've received well over 3,000 pre-registration enquiries."

A. Paul Ludlow, president, P&O Cruises: "For guests preferring an ex-UK holiday, we have a huge range departing year-round from our homeport of Southampton to destinations including Norway, Spain, Portugal, the Canary Islands and Italy as well as longer no-fly holidays to the Caribbean, US and Canada. Availability for family groups during the 2021 summer holidays is already extremely limited and we recommend guests look at alternative school holidays such as Easter, Christmas or half-term."

We are very pleased to say our first post-Covid-19 cruise – a 13-day river sailing – successfully came to an end last week

Q. What onboard facilities – from bars to spas – will be available when sailings restart?

A. Shane Riley, associate vice-president of international sales, Virgin Voyages: "Ensuring that our sailors and crew feel safe and secure is our top priority, and part of this will require us to be more mindful of physical distancing while enjoying public spaces on board. Yes, our bars and entertainment spaces will be open, but with capacity in mind so all feel comfortable to enjoy their holiday. These measures will

be strictly enforced and easily managed through our onboard technology, using The Band for contactless payment, Service Chat for digital assistance and Virtual Queues for onboard experiences."

A. Kristin Karst, executive vice-president, AmaWaterways: "We are well-prepared to implement the recommended sanitation protocols and social distancing guidelines so our guests can safely continue to enjoy our spa services, daily exercise classes and hiking and biking tours. Bikes are sanitised after each use and our open-air Sun Decks are the perfect place for small-group exercise classes – social distancing is easily respected and the views are the best!"

Q. Will guests still be able to enjoy shore excursions?

A. Arno Reitsma, chief executive, Scylla [which runs river ships chartered by operators including Riviera Travel, Tauck, Nicko Cruises and Viva Cruises]: "We are ➤

DESTINATIONS

CRUISE | YOUR QUESTIONS



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Nicko Cruises' NickoVision; Crystal Cruises' Crystal Esprit; The Retreat on Seabourn Encore; and Fred Olsen Cruise Lines' Balmoral



PICTURES: Ian Schemper; Filippo Vnardi; Steve Dunlop; Eric Laignel; Julian Elliott/Ethereal Light

very pleased to say Scylla's first post-Covid-19 cruise successfully came to an end last week, after 13 days of sailing along the Danube, Main and Rhine rivers. Guests were satisfied with the cruise experience and mentioned they felt completely safe with the new measures we've introduced on our ships.

"Our cruises will continue running but with a reduced number of guests to guarantee optimal social distancing. The excursions are now carried out using a wireless tour guide system to minimise interaction between guests, passers-by and tour guides. Further contactless experiences have also been introduced on the ships, such as at the check-in process. We are really looking forward to resuming operations on the rest of the European rivers and welcoming our British guests again."

Q. What screening can clients expect at their port of embarkation?

A. Alastair Welch, regional director, ABP

Southampton: "We are working with all our cruise lines and partner organisations to establish what enhanced health and safety measures are appropriate for when cruise passenger operations return. These are constantly under review as the understanding of the virus evolves. As soon as we are clear on the protocols and guest experience, we will work with the cruise lines to ensure this information is shared with agent partners and passengers."

A. Ian Diaper, head of operations, Portsmouth



Andy Harmer, director, Clia UK & Ireland

"As is often said these days, we are living in unprecedented times. The world has been faced with a health crisis that has affected restaurants, hotels, theatres and, yes, cruise ships. What is different about our industry, however, is that no other sector, including airlines, has such stringent screening protocols or illness-reporting requirements already in place year-round, outside a global crisis."

"Your customers will, no doubt, be looking to you for reassurance on the health and safety measures on board cruise ships when booking their next holiday. Consideration is being given to more-robust screening protocols that go even further than other travel sectors. While cleaning and hygiene protocols are already among the strictest in hospitality, plans are under consideration to expand stringent cleaning and sanitation practices. And, like every form of travel, we should expect distancing measures appropriate at the time."

"While new measures mean cruises will be slightly different from what we're used to, what will not change is the fantastic service provided by crew and the unique experiences that only a cruise holiday can provide. Our industry is, at heart, a people business. We are a close-knit community and it is this collaborative culture that makes our industry so adept at facing and overcoming adversity."

International Port: "We're fortunate to have a modern terminal building, which has been reconfigured to create a one-way system. Cruise operators have the option to use our temperature-check camera, a discreet system that reads a passenger's temperature as they pass through security. There is also the option to work flexibly with cruise lines; for example, for passengers to be driven directly to the ship. We hope these measures give comfort and confidence to passengers that we're doing what we can to help reduce infections on board." **TW**