

Cruise in to 2021

Cruise lines have been hard at work putting plans in place to restart their sailings in 2021, but what can your clients expect next year? **Laura French** finds out

W

ith ongoing travel restrictions,

uncertainty around restart dates and general hesitation in the market, it might not seem like the easiest time to sell a cruise, but the reality is there's a whole sea of potential clients desperate to get back on the waters as soon as the time is right, and they'll be looking to you for advice.

Clia, the World Health Organization, the UK Chamber of Shipping, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and a range of other bodies have been working with the cruise lines to devise stringent protocols ready for when sailing does resume, but what exactly will it look like? We've put together a guide to the key protocols – pre-departure, on board and ashore – to give you an idea.

TESTS AND TEMPERATURE CHECKS

When it comes to the departure process, guests going on an ocean cruise with any Clia

member will now require a negative Covid test result to be able to board.

Some lines are asking for two tests; Crystal Cruises and Saga Cruises passengers will need to take a Covid test at home as well as at the terminal, while Aurora Expeditions will give everyone a PCR test the day before boarding as well as requiring one taken in their home country.

Others are taking it up a notch; MSC Cruises recently announced it would be testing all passengers on board mid-way through their cruise, while Viking Cruises has installed the first full-scale, at-sea PCR testing lab on *Viking Star*, with capacity to test all guests and crew every day (soon to be rolled out on the line's other ships).

Guests can also expect screenings and temperature checks to be ubiquitous both before and during the cruise. Virgin Voyages is installing thermal camera technology to monitor temperatures at the terminal and on board, for ➤

5
OF THE
BEST

NEW OCEAN SHIPS

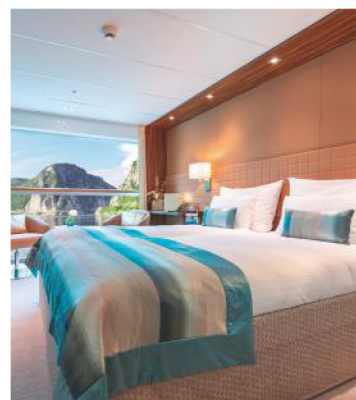
Carnival Mardi Gras: Launched this year and entering service in 2021, this highly anticipated behemoth will be the first cruise ship in North America to be powered by liquefied natural gas, and will feature an at-sea rollercoaster alongside six themed family zones.

Bolette and Borealis: Soon to emerge from a makeover, these former Holland America ships are joining Fred Olsen Cruise Lines in 2021. They offer a faster sailing speed along with several facilities new to the fleet, including two-tiered theatres, a culinary demonstration kitchen and a greater choice of bars and restaurants.

Odyssey of the Seas: The first Quantum Ultra-class ship to sail in the US and Europe in 2021, this new Royal Caribbean vessel will feature all the standout attractions you'd expect from the line – skydiving simulator, 'FlowRider' surf ride, dodgems and a rock-climbing wall – plus a 360-degree glass observation pod elevated 100 metres above the sea.

Rotterdam: Named after Holland America's first ship, the line's new vessel is set to be delivered in July, and will spend the summer sailing northern Europe and the Baltic on round-trip cruises from Amsterdam. The third in the Pinnacle Class series, it will carry 2,668 guests and offer nightly live music at signature venues such as BB King's Blues Club, alongside a roster of entertainment, activities and dining.

Seabourn Venture: Seabourn will be combining expedition with ultra-luxury when polar-class *Venture* (below) is delivered in December 2021. Featuring 132 all-veranda, all-oceanfront suites, the purpose-built vessel will explore the polar regions, the Amazon, Europe and beyond, and be followed by a sister ship in 2022.



example, while Hurtigruten will be carrying out contactless temperature scanning on embarkation and as guests enter the restaurants each mealtime.

Testing and screening will be even more stringent for the crew. Seabourn says its staff will have daily temperature and Covid surveillance checks as well as frequent tests, while Crystal's crew members will be tested before leaving home, at embarkation, and then a third time after a seven-day quarantine on the ship, before they can begin their duties.

EMBARKATION

Alongside guest screenings, lines will be staggering arrival times to avoid overcrowding. Princess Cruises says guests will be able to choose their preferred slot, while others, including Celestyal Cruises and Royal Caribbean Group lines (Royal Caribbean, Celebrity, Silversea and Azamara), will be providing guests with set boarding times to spread things out. Digital, contact-free check-in is also likely

“Digital, contact-free check-in is also likely to be commonplace, as will luggage disinfection and self-declaration forms

to be commonplace, as will luggage disinfection procedures and self-declaration forms.

ON BOARD

Clients can expect social distancing, face coverings in public places and/or where social distancing isn't possible (specifics depend on the individual lines), and even more hand sanitiser units than usual.

Many have also enhanced their ventilation systems; Emerald Waterways, Crystal, Celestyal, Saga and MSC are among the raft of lines putting the emphasis on 100% fresh, non-recirculated air. Norwegian Cruise Line and Windstar Cruises will meanwhile have medical-grade Hepa air filters across their fleets.

Ships will be reducing overall passenger numbers. Saga, for example, says it will have a maximum of 800 passengers (usually 1,000), while upping its crew-to-guest ratio to enhance cleaning regimes.

Those cleaning protocols will of course be everywhere, especially around high-touch areas and public spaces. Uniworld River Cruises is upping the game further by spraying its ships with an “odourless,



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Canoeing in Alaska with Holland America Line; Amadeus Star cabin with panoramic window; Borealis, Fred Olsen Cruise Lines; Emerald Waterways' Radiance in Portugal PICTURE: Florian Schulte

non-toxic and sustainable” ACT CleanCoat solution that makes surfaces self-disinfecting. Scenic Eclipse will also be coated with an odourless surface solution that decomposes microbes and purifies the air when exposed to light, according to the line.

TOUCH-FREE SYSTEMS

Many are putting an emphasis on touch-free systems, including contactless payments. Scenic and Emerald Cruises will have contact-free guest services and automated doors to limit touch points.

Princess Cruises' wearable technology, OceanMedallion, debuted in 2018 and operating as a digital key, contactless payment system and general personal assistant – will now offer additional services such as showing you the busiest spots on the ship so you know where to avoid.

Likewise, the MSC for Me wristband will enable contactless payments and facilitate track and trace systems, while guests sailing on Celebrity, Azamara and

Royal Caribbean will be able to download a digital key on their smartphones to unlock the room touch-free. The group has also replaced its in-person muster drill with a digital version, combining training on its mobile app with an in-cabin interactive system on the TV, marking an industry first, according to the company.

ON SHORE

Shore activities are also likely to see some changes, with disembarkation and excursions themselves being done in smaller groups; Hurtigruten will be capping its coaches at 50% of normal numbers, for example.

Independent exploration may also be limited at the start; P&O Cruises, Crystal and MSC all say guests will initially only be able to explore on organised excursions, while Celestyal says guests will be “strongly advised” to take the line's organised excursions for health and safety reasons.

Carnival Cruise Line says details of its shore procedures are still being finalised. “The CDC will

“The CDC will expect us to have a consistent method of maintaining health and safety standards

expect us to have a consistent method of maintaining health and safety standards and that includes during shore excursions, which will likely mean defining how guests can experience destinations,” explains Adolfo Perez, senior vice president of trade sales and marketing. “As details are finalised, destinations are going to have something to say about access by guests.”

But Lynn Narraway, UK and Ireland managing director for Holland America Line, says cruise lines will be working to overcome this. “As cruise lines, we know the port experience for our guests includes self-discovery,” she says. “We want to find solutions that

will permit these kinds of activities without compromising our ability to sail.”

DINING

When it comes to dining, pre-booking may become more commonplace – Hurtigruten will offer different dining slots, for example – although some lines say they will keep open seating.

Bubble dining is likely to be the order of the day; P&O says guests will only be able to dine with the group they're travelling with or their household to allow for social distancing, while Uniworld likewise says dining will be done in bubbles and with fewer guests on each table. Amadeus will cap numbers at four per table, with the exception of families.

Many are scrapping buffets in favour of waiter service, while others will see crew plating individual items at the buffet stations. Digital menus and QR codes also look set to be a common theme. **SPAS, GYMS AND POOLS** On the facilities front, spas, ➤

DESTINATIONS

CRUISE | WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2021

FLEXIBLE BOOKING

FUTURE CRUISE CREDIT

If cruises are suspended, clients can expect credit of at least 100% of the original booking, with some going above that. P&O, MSC, Holland America, Celebrity, Royal Caribbean, Scenic and Crystal are among the lines offering 125% Future Cruise Credit, with most useable until the end of 2021 and in some cases beyond. Virgin Voyages is offering a generous 200%.

BOOKING AMENDMENTS

Many lines are also offering flexible policies for customers wanting to change their booking: APT customers can change the date of their 2021 or 2022 booking up to 100 days prior to departure. Cunard guests can change to another itinerary before paying the final balance, and Fred Olsen offers a similar deal under its Plain Sailing Guarantee – along with the option of a full deposit refund. If guests can't travel due to a positive Covid test, they can also rebook another cruise for free up to the day of departure.

CANCELLATIONS

Princess lets guests cancel up to 30 days before departing, and NCL up to 15 days prior; both offer Future Cruise Credit in exchange. Several other lines, including Azamara, Seabourn, Hurtigruten and more, are likewise offering flexible policies under 'Book with Confidence' deals.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Spa on Saga's Spirit of Adventure; MSC deep cleans its ship every night; BB King's All-Star Band, Holland America Line PICTURES: Michel Verdure



pools and gyms will mostly remain open. "The Healthy Sailing Panel has declared pools and spas 'low-risk zones', providing everyone adheres to distancing guidelines," says Ben Bouldin, Royal Caribbean's EMEA vice-president. "All treatments will be carried out as safely as possible, limiting contact where possible, and all crew members giving treatments will be equipped with the necessary PPE to reduce the risk of transmission to a bare minimum."

Uniwold likewise says massages will still be going ahead, with pre-treatment health checks, thorough sanitisation and therapists wearing appropriate PPE.

But guests can expect caps on numbers in spa, pool and gym facilities, and some might require pre-booking. Celestyal, for example, says guests will need to pre-arrange appointments for wellness, beauty, entertainment and activities, with numbers "strictly limited", while P&O will be reducing numbers in all public areas including spas, pools and gyms and may also ask guests to pre-book.

ENTERTAINMENT AND ACTIVITIES

When it comes to entertainment, most lines will be keeping their regular roster of shows, with social distancing measures and other modifications in place.

"Musicians, as with everybody else coming on board, will undergo a health check," says Uniwold's UK managing director Chris Townson. "Any entertainment that can take place on deck will happen there (weather permitting. A risk assessment would also be conducted,

"The Healthy Sailing Panel has declared pools and spas 'low-risk zones', as long as distancing guidelines are followed

based on the epidemiological situation at that time and in that area."

MSC is likewise keeping its entertainment. "Our onboard activities and entertainment have been redesigned to enable smaller group sizes and we advise that guests book these in advance," says Antonio Paradiso, UK & Ireland managing director.

"A rich programme of activities is still available throughout the cruise, including themed events, family activities, talent shows and more. Our theatre is operating at reduced capacity to ensure social distancing and is cleaned after each performance."

NCL says all of its activities will be available but with reduced capacity and modified where needed, while Holland America plans on having staggered activity times. P&O also says it will still be running its kids' clubs and activities, in line with the latest approved guidance to minimise contact.

So, despite a few differences that might take some getting used to, the cruise show looks set to go on in 2021. **TW**