



Staycations at sea

Domestic cruises look set to steal the show this summer, but who's sailing where? **Laura French** gets the lowdown



from rugged cliffs and remote islands to heritage-rich towns and culture-filled cities, there's plenty to discover across every inch of the British Isles – but if clients have already done the classic staycations, it might be time to explore from another perspective.

All hail the domestic cruise. When it was announced last month that cruises could set sail at the same time as domestic tourism restarts – scheduled for May 17 – the industry was quick to respond, launching summer sailings left, right and centre. Demand was immediate. After P&O Cruises launched its UK sailings, Iglu Cruise reported its highest volume of online bookings since the start of the Covid crisis; Cunard said it had its busiest booking day in a decade after putting its voyages on sale on March 31; and all but one of Saga Cruises' British Isles itineraries have already sold out.

So how can you get in on this lucrative sector before it's too late? We've put together a guide to help you wise up on what's what, from ports of call and shore excursions to sailing dates and boarding requirements.

CELEBRITY CRUISES

Departing from: Southampton.

When: From July 3.

The details: Celebrity will be operating its just-renovated *Silhouette* on a series of six to eight-night itineraries. Ports of call include Liverpool, Portland in Dorset, Belfast, Inverness, Greenock (Glasgow) and Kirkwall in the Orkney Islands. While independent exploration won't be allowed initially, there'll be a range of shore excursions, from wine tasting on the Jurassic Coast to bread-making at an 18th-century Irish cottage (at extra cost).

Vaccination required? Yes, for adults. Crew will also have been vaccinated.

Children allowed? Yes; under-18s need a negative PCR test.

Book it: A seven-night cruise visiting Inverness, Kirkwall and Greenock starts at £1,299, departing August 21. The line has added an Always Included deal, meaning Wi-Fi, drinks and service fees are part of the package. celebritycruises.com

CUNARD

Departing from: Southampton.

When: From July 19.

The details: Cunard is running a series of three to 12-night scenic coastal voyages from Southampton between July and October, taking in the Jurassic Coast, Land's End, the Isle of Arran, Mull of Kintyre and Sound of Mull. Four will also be stopping at ports – including Liverpool, Greenock, Invergordon, Belfast, Newcastle and Holyhead – and there will be three 'unscripted' Sun Voyages, which won't call at any ports but will instead sail to wherever is sunniest at the time.

Vaccination required? Yes, for all passengers.

Children allowed? Yes.

Book it: A four-night scenic British Isles Voyage costs from £499; a seven-night Sun Voyage starts at £699. cunard.com

DISNEY CRUISE LINE

Departing from: Liverpool (from July), Southampton (from August), Newcastle and Tilbury (from September).

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Vax facts

Where vaccines are needed to board, passengers must have had two doses (unless stated otherwise). Some lines require this up to 14 days in advance, so check with each operator for the latest details.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: City Hall, Belfast; dolphins are among the wildlife visible from Fred Olsen Cruise Lines' coastal sailings, featuring experts from marine charity Orca; Disney Cruise Line's Captain Minnie Mouse; the Starship Club on MSC Virtuosa

PICTURES: Matt Strohane/Disney Cruise Line; Richard Lovelock



The details: Disney Cruise Line will be sailing two, three and four-night scenic staycation voyages between July and October, giving guests a chance to experience its legendary shows, dining and activities without leaving the UK. Sailings will be on *Disney Magic*, and passengers will remain on board throughout the cruise.

Vaccination required? TBC.

Children allowed? Yes.

Book it: Bookings are due to open on April 30, or from April 28 for Castaway Club members.
disneycruise.co.uk

FRED OLSEN CRUISE LINES

Departing from: Dover and Liverpool.

When: From July 5.

The details: Fred Olsen is offering 11 domestic cruises on its Welcome Back programme in July and August, sailing on new ships *Borealis* and *Bolette* as well as *Balmoral*. Sailings range from a four-night no-port cruise around Scotland, passing the Isle of Skye, the Inner Hebrides and the Sound of Mull, to a five-night Touring Scenic British Isles trip docking in Belfast and Falmouth. Other itineraries span the Shetlands, Channel Islands and Isles of Scilly, with no-port cruises hosting experts from marine charity Orca to teach guests about the wildlife they encounter.

Vaccination required? TBC.

Children allowed? Yes.

Book it: A three-night maiden voyage around Scotland on *Borealis* starts at £599, departing July 5 from Liverpool.
fredolsencruises.com

ASK THE expert

GEOFF RIDGEON
head of sales, Fred Olsen Cruise Lines



"It's important to understand what your customer wants from their cruise. For some, the chance to gaze at spectacular scenery and wildlife direct from the ship will be just the break they need, while others might want to get ashore and explore."

HURTIGRUTEN

Departing from: Dover.

When: From August 15.

The details: Hurtigruten is running two British Isles cruises, using its small expedition ships to dock at destinations bigger vessels can't access. Cruisers can choose between 13 and 15-day itineraries, with the latter taking in Fowey, the Isles of Scilly, Fishguard, Waterford, the Isle of Man, Rathlin Island – home to Northern Ireland's biggest seabird colony – St Kilda and more.

Vaccination required? TBC.

Children allowed? Yes.

Book it: A 13-day British Isles cruise costs from £3,315, departing August 15 and September 10.
hurtigruten.co.uk

MARELLA CRUISES

Departing from: Southampton and Newcastle.

When: From June 25.

The details: *Marella Explorer* will sail seven itineraries from Southampton covering Scotland, the Irish Sea and the south and west coasts. They'll take in Belfast, Dover, Portland, Dublin, Invergordon, Lerwick, Leith, Liverpool and beyond, with optional excursions at each. The adult-only *Marella Explorer 2* will sail from Newcastle.

Vaccination required? Yes, for all adults.

Children allowed? Yes, on *Marella Explorer*; under-18s need to provide proof of a negative lateral flow test.

Book it: A three-night Sail the South Coast cruise starts at £418, departing June 25.
tui.co.uk



LEFT: Glasgow
BELOW: Princess Cruises' *Sky Princess*
PICTURE: Filippo Vinardi



MSC CRUISES

Departing from: Southampton, Liverpool and Greenock.

When: From May 20.

The details: New ship *MSC Virtuosa* will embark on its maiden season around the British Isles with features including a robotic bartender and what's said to be the biggest shopping area at sea. Three and four-night mini-cruises from Southampton will call at Portland, while five, seven and nine-night sailings add the likes of Belfast, Liverpool and Greenock.

Vaccination required? No.

Children allowed? Yes.

Book it: A four-night cruise round-trip from Southampton via Portland starts at £499, departing May 20, 24 and 28. msccruises.co.uk

P&O CRUISES

Departing from: Southampton.

When: From June 27.

The details: The line will be running coastal cruises from June to September, sailing to wherever the forecast looks best. New ship *Iona* will make its debut with a maiden voyage around the Scottish islands, anchoring off Iona – its island namesake – for a sunset stop, while *Britannia* will operate three and four-night breaks taking in the south coast, with a six-night trip including a stop in Liverpool.

Vaccination required? Yes, for all passengers.

Children allowed? Yes.

Book it: *Iona*'s seven-night maiden voyage starts from £1,049, departing August 7. pocruises.com

PRINCESS CRUISES

Departing from: Southampton.

When: From July 31.

The details: Princess Cruises' domestic sailings will be on the line's Medallion Class ships, *Regal Princess* and

ASK THE expert

NIGEL BLANKS
chief executive,
Saga Cruises



"Reassure customers by learning about the procedures in place. At Saga we've introduced a host of Covid-safe protocols, including pre-boarding testing and medical screening, a reduced number of guests, an increased crew-to-guest ratio, enhancements to air conditioning and medical facilities, and an onboard medical team."

the newer *Sky Princess*. There'll be 24 voyages in total, ranging from three to seven nights, calling at Portland, Liverpool, Belfast and Greenock. Planned shore excursions include a visit to Titanic Belfast, a Beatles-themed excursion around Liverpool and a boat cruise and vintage train ride in the Lake District.

Vaccination required? Yes.

Children allowed? Yes.

Book it: A three-night, no-port Summer Seacation cruise starts at £539, departing July 31. princess.com

RIVIERA TRAVEL

Departing from: Leith (Edinburgh) or Greenock.

When: From July 5.

The details: Riviera Travel is debuting new expedition ship *Seaventure* on an eight-day Cruising Scotland's Highlands & Islands itinerary. Four voyages on the 158-passenger vessel will take in Aberdeen, Inverness, Orkney, Oban, the Outer Hebrides and Belfast, with excursions to Loch Ness, Balmoral Castle, Titanic Belfast and the Unesco-listed Ring of Brodgar in the Orkneys.

Vaccination required? No. Guests who haven't been fully vaccinated must present a negative test, which the company is offering for free.

Children allowed? Over-12s only.

Book it: The eight-day cruise from Leith, departing July 19, starts at £1,999. rivieratravel.co.uk

ROYAL CARIBBEAN INTERNATIONAL

Departing from: Southampton.

When: From July 7.

The details: Royal Caribbean fans will be pleased to hear *Anthem of the Seas* is bringing its much-talked-about features – four pools, a skydiving simulator and climbing wall among them – to the UK for

DESTINATIONS

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ASK THE experts

CLAIRE STIRRUP UK director of sales, Celebrity Cruises

"Make the most of training. We've created a dedicated toolkit housing all the latest information, videos and flyers on *Celebrity Silhouette* on our training platform, Celebrity Central. We're also offering incentives to support agents in selling a summer staycation, including £20 Celebrity Rewards points for every booking and double Captain's Club points for guests."

SONIA LIMBRICK head of cruise, Port of Dover

"We've been working closely with Clia, the Chamber of Shipping, the Department for Transport, Cruise Britain and the cruise lines to follow the framework for the resumption of cruise operations in the UK. We will have designated areas for testing, with terminals prepared to offer passengers a safe environment before they board or disembark their ship."

ANDY WILLIAMSON passenger operations manager, Portsmouth International Port

"For clients concerned about boarding, highlight the health protocols. Depending on how cruise lines want to manage operations, we can offer staggered arrivals, lateral flow testing, temperature checks on arrival and car parking next to the terminal, and we go through detailed plans with each cruise operator in advance."



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Urquhart Castle by Loch Ness, which can be visited on tours from Invergordon; Virgin Voyages' *Scarlet Lady*; and Viking Cruises' *Viking Sky*

PICTURES: Mike Louagie; rpeters86

a season of five to eight-night domestic cruises. Ports of call will include Liverpool, Belfast, Kirkwall, Greenock and Inverness, with shore excursions available at extra cost.

Vaccination required? Yes. Crew will be fully vaccinated too.

Children allowed? Yes, with a negative PCR test result.

Book it: A five-night British Isles cruise, sailing July 15, starts at £749. royalcaribbean.com

SAGA CRUISES

Departing from: Tilbury.

When: From June 27.

The details: Saga's new *Spirit of Adventure* will make its inaugural sailing on July 26, calling at Newcastle, the Isle of Man, Edinburgh, Kirkwall, Belfast and Bristol. *Spirit of Discovery* will also sail domestic itineraries in July and August, including a 14-night Great British Isles Adventure taking in Falmouth, Holyhead, Greenock, Ullapool and beyond, alongside three other sold-out itineraries.

Vaccination required? Yes.

Children allowed? No.

Book it: The Great British Isles Adventure starts at £3,899, departing July 11 and including a private chauffeur transfer for households up to 250 miles away. travel.saga.co.uk

TRADEWIND VOYAGES

Departing from: Portsmouth, Liverpool, Harwich, Leith and Greenock.

When: From June 22.

The details: This new luxury cruise line will make its debut with cruises on the 272-guest *Golden Horizon* – a five-masted sailing vessel boasting three pools, two restaurants and a spa. The cruises will run from June to September, with seven itineraries ranging from the southwest of England to the west coast of Scotland. Ports of call across the itineraries include Falmouth, Dartmouth, Cowes, Poole, Fowey, Aberdeen, Ullapool, the Isle of Skye and Kirkwall.

Vaccination required? TBC.

Children allowed? TBC.

Book it: A four-night Maritime Cities of the Northwest cruise from Greenock to Liverpool starts at £849, departing July 21. tradewindvoyages.com

VIKING CRUISES

Departing from: Portsmouth.

When: From May 22.

The details: Liverpool, the Isles of Scilly, Falmouth and Portland are ports of call on England's Scenic Shores cruise, a seven-night voyage with five departures in May and June, including on new ship

Viking Venus, which has its naming ceremony in the UK on May 17. Independent exploration won't be permitted, but guests can expect shore excursions ranging from VIP access to Tatton Park while docked in Liverpool to a lobster lunch at a vineyard in Treco in the Isles of Scilly.

Vaccination required? Yes.

Children allowed? No.

Book it: The seven-night cruise costs from £1,690, with available departures on June 19 and 26. vikingcruises.co.uk

VIRGIN VOYAGES

Departing from: Portsmouth.

When: From August 6.

The details: Virgin Voyages is running six domestic Summer Soirée sailings in August, giving guests a chance to sample *Scarlet Lady*'s long-awaited restaurants, bars and shows. The two, three and four-night itineraries will sail along the southern coast from Portsmouth without docking, with exact routes yet to be confirmed.

Vaccination required? Yes.

Children allowed? No.

Book it: A three-night Long Weekender starts at £998 for a Sea Terrace cabin, including \$600 onboard credit, departing August 6, 13 and 20. virginvoyages.com 