

ASK THE EXPERTS

Following Clia's Luxury and Expedition Showcase, **Laura French** seeks advice on how to sell an expedition cruise



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1 "Use images and videos in your marketing materials"

Monique joined Aurora Expeditions in October 2020 after more than 25 years in the travel industry. She has worked in expedition cruising for seven years, with previous roles at Ponant and Paul Gauguin Cruises, and will oversee the launch of new ship *Sylvia Earle* in October.



Monique Ponfoort
chief executive,
Aurora Expeditions

Dive deep into the experience in any way you can by watching documentaries, attending virtual industry events and webinars, signing up to newsletters, and really familiarising yourself with the products on the market. Also, make sure you have strong images and videos in your sales and marketing materials, as these breathtaking polar regions can really sell themselves.

It's also important to remember that passenger numbers really matter in these regions. Only 100 people can be on land at any one time in Antarctica or the Arctic, so it's important to make sure clients are aware of this when choosing which expedition operator to travel with. Larger ships can mean fewer or rotational landings each day, whereas a smaller ship will ensure more time on land.

In terms of practical tips, suggest clients pack two batteries for their cameras – batteries drain much more quickly in the cold. On the flipside, encourage your clients to live in the moment and not be completely behind the camera lens!

When it comes to trends, consumer attitudes have definitely changed. We are seeing a move towards booking one incredible trip per year, rather than taking several smaller holidays. Passengers are also choosing more carefully. They want to travel with an ethically minded company that respects the wildlife and fragile environments they visit.

2 "Understand the USPs of each ship"

Joseph leads Scenic's trade sales channel in the UK, supporting agents with marketing, training and incentives. He has worked in travel for 33 years including two-and-a-half years at Scenic, and travelled on flagship *Scenic Eclipse* during its inaugural season.



Joseph Grimley
director of trade sales UK,
Scenic

My top tip for trade partners would be to highlight the many benefits of booking a luxury expedition cruise: remote locations, highly personalised experiences, smaller groups and passenger numbers, plus full immersion in the culture, nature and wildlife of a destination – all led by onboard experts.

It's also important to understand the USPs of each ship. For example, guests on *Scenic Eclipse* can explore further with two onboard helicopters and a submarine, *Scenic Neptune*.

In terms of destination, for an experience that very few have had the chance to enjoy, I would recommend the Northeast and Northwest Passages in the Arctic. These voyages explore some of the greatest seaways in the world, covered in ice for most of the year.

When it comes to trends, itineraries across the Antarctic Circle and our first-ever itineraries to Japan and the Russian Arctic are proving especially popular for 2022-23. Bookings are steadily picking up with plenty of pent-up demand. Recent bookings include the very best suites available, suggesting customers are willing to spend more to make up for lost time. Booking trends also indicate that travellers are starting to plan for late 2021, 2022 and beyond.

3 "Be one step ahead with destination knowledge"

Lynn has worked for Carnival Corporation for more than 20 years and spent two years as chair of the Clia Executive Committee. She received the Clia Outstanding Achievement Award in 2013 and was also voted as one of the top-60 women in the travel industry in 2014 by the AWTE.



Lynn Narraway
managing director UK & Ireland,
Seabourn

One of my biggest pieces of advice for agents is to research some of the places on your clients' wish lists and make sure you are one step ahead of them with destination knowledge. For example, you need to know the best time of year to travel to each destination. Expedition ships 'migrate' from season to season – so are deployed in the Arctic and Antarctic during their respective summer seasons, when sunlight, ice and weather conditions allow for off-ship activities and when wildlife are there for breeding and rearing.

For clients yet to experience a polar voyage, we recommend they take an Arctic expedition first – one that may take in the northern lights, Svalbard and Greenland – for birdlife, polar bears, other wildlife and incredible natural beauty.

Next on their list should be Antarctica to see penguin colonies, bubble-net feeding by whales, glaciers, ice stations and more.

For warm-weather expeditions, Panama and South America (from September to November) will include snorkelling, swimming, dolphin and whale-watching. The Amazon (from March to April) is also the perfect destination for a smaller expedition ship, as it will be able to navigate tributaries and seasonally flooded forests, offering guests opportunities to take Zodiac trips to see sloths and howler monkeys and visit local villages.

4 “Get to know your clients’ interests”

Akvile joined Silversea in 2011 and has held various positions at the company, including a role onboard one of its expedition ships and now working as part of the global expedition development and operations team. The line has been offering luxury expeditions since 2008.



Akvile Marozaitė
expedition operations manager for special projects, Silversea Cruises

Get to know the client and their interests. Guests who have previously booked safari holidays, for example, might enjoy wildlife-rich itineraries to destinations such as Antarctica, the Galápagos, the Arctic and the Kimberley coast in Australia.

For those interested in different cultures, itineraries to the west coast of Africa, the Pacific islands, South America and Indonesia hold appeal.

The Russian Far East and Alaska, meanwhile, offer extraordinary wildlife experiences, both in water and on land, as well as the chance to meet some of the most resilient communities on Earth, living in challenging and often unforgiving environments. Our new Kimberley itineraries on *Silver Explorer* are also popular.

For guests who have reservations about travelling by ship, I would suggest a shorter sailing. We will be offering seven-day itineraries on *Silver Origin*, which has been built specifically for the Galápagos and will be based there year-round, scheduled to start sailing from this June.

One of the biggest mistakes when selling expedition cruising is comparing an expedition ship to a normal cruise ship. The amenities on an expedition ship extend well beyond the ship itself. The expertise of expedition staff, the number of landings, intimate wildlife encounters and exclusive shore experiences are what really form the expedition experience for guests.

5 “Break down the prices to highlight value”

Stephen joined Ponant as international sales director in 2008 and leads the sales team to develop new business across the world. He has been in the travel industry for 32 years, with experience working for the likes of New Frontiers and Accor Hotels.



Stephen Winter
international sales director, Ponant

Highlight the value of an expedition cruise. Sometimes the price can seem like a barrier to sales, so I often break it down to a per-day rate and show what’s included: accommodation, transport, all meals and room service, open bar, Zodiac landings, entertainment and so on. This shows the value of a cruise versus a land trip in a five-star hotel.

It’s also worth spreading the net wide when targeting new-to-cruise customers. We managed to operate about 60 cruises last summer, and 51% of our guests were newcomers. Our average age in 2020 dropped from 65 to 62 and our booking window of 12 months in 2019 reduced to seven months.

There are also misconceptions about cruising that need to be challenged. There are cruises for every budget and ships of every size. Our ships are more like boutique hotels than floating cities. And with expedition cruising, there’s the privilege of going to remote places in small groups, far from the tourist crowds, where nature and wildlife dominate.

Also, remember that no two expedition cruises are alike. The conditions are constantly changing, and the crew must adapt daily, so they’re much less regimented and scheduled than standard ocean cruises.

6 “Target clients who aren’t necessarily cruisers”

Jonny is responsible for building relationships with luxury partners, focusing on Celebrity Cruises’ Galápagos expedition programme on *Celebrity Flora* and its fleet-wide suite product, *The Retreat*. He has worked in travel for 20 years, including seven with Celebrity Cruises.



Jonny Peat
business development manager, Celebrity Cruises

We’re getting a lot of forward bookings for our expedition cruises to the Galápagos. We opened bookings for cruises through to the end of 2023 recently and we’re seeing that people are really keen to plan that once-in-a-lifetime trip.

When you’re selling the region, it’s worth targeting clients who aren’t necessarily cruisers but are looking for an adventurous holiday. We often see a real crossover with guests travelling to the Galápagos who have visited destinations such as Alaska and Australia, where they’re attracted by the wildlife and landscapes, so open up the conversation with that type of client.

I travelled on *Celebrity Flora* and it offered a truly special experience. It’s a great trip to plan for a special birthday or anniversary, and we’re seeing more and more of that with people prioritising experiences over possessions.

Also, when you’re selling an expedition cruise, take your ocean cruise hat off. Understanding how the onboard experience on an expedition cruise differs will really help. Our online training modules can help give an overview, with images and information to bring the experience to life.

And remember that luxury is a word that means something different to everyone. In the expedition space, it’s not about decadence and opulence, but innovative onboard features that make the guest experience better.