



## WENDY ATKIN-SMITH

UK MANAGING DIRECTOR, VIKING

INTERVIEW BY Katie McGonagle

**Q. How did it feel to be at the naming ceremony for your seventh ocean ship, *Viking Venus*, one of the first to restart sailings from the UK?**

A. It was a very proud day for all of us at Viking. We were the first cruise line to suspend operations in March 2020, and at that point we certainly did not think it would be 14 months until we returned to service. It felt like a monumental occasion as it marked our restart globally, but it was also particularly special for the UK team – to be the first destination for our newest ocean ship, *Viking Venus*; to have a British godmother, Anne Diamond; and for the naming ceremony to take place in the UK. There was also a great sense of anticipation as our crew prepared to welcome guests back for the first sailing of our England's Scenic Shores itinerary, which departed on May 22.

**Q. How did it feel stepping back on board a ship again?**

A. All our ocean ships are identical so even though *Viking Venus* is a brand-new ship, I felt like I was back home again. I think we had all been waiting for that moment for more than a year so everyone was feeling the same way – we will never take travel for granted again but at the same time it felt familiar, relaxed and, above all, safe.

**Q. What changes would guests notice on board?**

A. Vaccinated guests on our new Welcome Back voyages will experience Viking's industry-leading health and safety programme,

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Viking Venus in Portsmouth

grounded in scientific research and developed with an international team of medical advisors. Utilising a full-scale laboratory installed on every Viking ocean ship, all guests and crew receive quick and non-invasive saliva PCR tests daily. New air purification technology has also been installed, and additional health checks, sanitisation and distancing measures provide further protection for guests and crew.

**Q. How did guests respond to the restart of sailing?**

A. The first three sailings of our England's Scenic Shores were fully booked by our loyal past guests within a week, but other sailings will be a mix of past guests, dedicated cruisers who are taking the opportunity to experience Viking, and those who are curious about cruising and trying it for the first time. The feedback about

the enhanced protocols has been entirely positive – guests have told us they feel safe and protected but that it has not detracted from their overall experience. We are following UK government guidelines, so many of the protocols, such as wearing face masks and social distancing, feel like second nature to us anyway, and we offer the additional layer of protection with daily testing.

**Q. Where is the ship sailing, and what was it like going ashore?**

A. *Viking Venus* is sailing round-trip from Portsmouth, calling at Liverpool, the Isles of Scilly, Falmouth and Portland. A highlight for me was definitely the warm welcome we received in all the

## WENDY'S TOP TIP

Apart from obvious benefits such as not having to fly, UK cruises offer very good value, so it's a great opportunity to entice clients who are new to cruise – especially as rates for staycations are very high and availability is limited across the UK.

ports we visited, especially Liverpool and Falmouth. *Viking Venus* was the first cruise ship to visit for more than 14 months so we were welcomed back with open arms by the local community.



PICTURES: Adam Hillier; Tom Langford

**Q. What's next for Viking?**

A. *Viking Venus* will be sailing around England's shores until the end of July, and we have just introduced a new itinerary, Scenic British Isles. As well as calls at Liverpool and Falmouth, guests will sail around some of Britain's enchanting isles, from the Inner Hebrides to the Channel Islands. On July 3, we set sail to Valletta in Malta to homeport for our new Mediterranean itineraries. In early 2022, we are launching expedition voyages on new purpose-built ships, which will be sailing to Antarctica, the Arctic and the Great Lakes, so this is another major milestone for Viking. **TW**