

Rule, Britannia

Take a staycation by sea with Jane Archer's guide to round-Britain cruises

If you were a British cruise line launching your first-ever ship, what would your inaugural voyage be? To the sunny Mediterranean? The scenic Norwegian fjords? City-hopping in the Baltic?

If you answered round-Britain, chances are you're on top of the news from Saga Cruises, namely that it is christening its new ship, *Spirit of Discovery*, in Dover next July and then sending it on a maiden voyage around the British Isles. The journey used to be all about Americans doing a grand tour of the 'old country', but it's becoming increasingly popular with British cruisers as a great way to see the UK.

POSITIVE REPORT

CruiseBritain chair James Stangroom said feedback from port members shows growing demand for round-Britain cruises is fuelled by both domestic and overseas markets.

Last year, Port of Tyne cruise calls were up from 29 in 2016 to 52, with a similar number booked for 2018, while Kirkwall in Orkney saw 60% growth in passenger numbers to 142,000 in 2017. Similarly, Liverpool welcomed nearly 60,000 passengers from April to the end of July, which represents a 150% rise on 2016.

Stangroom says: "More and more tourists are appreciating that a cruise is an ideal way



More tourists are appreciating that a cruise is an ideal way of exploring our diverse shores

explore the diversity of our shores, cities, attractions and activities."

Round-Britain cruises come with all the usual benefits of setting sail from the UK – no airport stress, no flight costs or luggage weight limits, the ease

of driving to the port and getting straight onto a ship – but there are many other upsides as well.

Passengers won't spend hours in traffic jams on Britain's overcrowded roads, and instead of forking out on hotel rooms and three meals a day as you would on a hotel-based holiday, a comfy cabin comes with breakfast, lunch and dinner included.

Friendly service is guaranteed and there's no need to change money (though euros will be useful if visiting Ireland) or brush up on language skills. Most importantly, clients will discover everything from castles to world-class cities and centuries-old history on their doorstep. ➔

BEST OF BRITISH

From Liverpool they can do a Beatles tour or join outings to Chester or the Lake District. Cunard offers afternoon tea with the Lord Mayor of Liverpool, plus a chance to go into the bell chamber of the city's Anglican cathedral and onto the rooftop for views of the metropolis below.

From Invergordon, they can search for monsters in Loch Ness, tour medieval Cawdor Castle and visit Culloden Moor, site of the last battle fought on British soil, when government troops defeated Charles Edward Stuart, aka Bonnie Prince Charlie, in 1746.

They can climb aboard former royal yacht *Britannia* in Rosyth, learn about the *Titanic* in Belfast, where the ill-fated ship was built, and explore Cobh, its last port of call before being sunk by an iceberg in the Atlantic in 1912.

In Newcastle, there's the Angel of the North, a 66-foot-high sculpture with a 177-foot wingspan, or tours to Durham, just over an hour away, where a Unesco-listed cathedral and a Norman castle built in 1072 are highlights.

Most cruises also visit St Peter Port in Guernsey, in the Channel Islands, where the beach, Second



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World War museums (the island was occupied by the Germans from 1940 to 1945) or round-island tour are among options.

SEA OF OPPORTUNITY

Cruise & Maritime Voyages is the champ when it comes to cruising the British Isles, with 13 departures in 2019 that are already filling fast.

CMV head of marketing Mike Hall says round-Britain cruises in June, July and August are its top-selling itineraries (a 10-night cruise on *Columbus* next June is already wait-listed) and tend to attract older, well-travelled clients keen to visit places on their doorstep they have never seen.

Cruises range from 10 to 14 nights and depart from UK ports including Portsmouth, Tilbury, Cardiff, Poole and Avonmouth. Hall says: "We focus on remote outer islands such as the Orkneys or Isles of Scilly, which our clients might not have seen and are expensive to visit any other way."

An 11-night cruise from Avonmouth on *Marco Polo* next April calls in to the Isles of Scilly, the Orkneys, the Outer Hebrides and the Isle of Mull, as well as Newcastle and Belfast. A 12-night voyage round-trip from Tilbury on *Columbus* in September visits the Orkneys, Isle of Skye, Isles of Scilly and Channel Islands, as

well as Belfast, Dublin and Cobh. Prices from £1,589 per person.

Every year, Princess Cruises dedicates one ship to a summer season of 12-night round-Britain sailings (it's *Crown Princess* in 2019), which offer an in-depth tour of the UK aimed at Americans, but are increasingly popular with British clients.

Tony Roberts, vice-president UK and Europe, says UK bookings for round-Britain cruises this year are up more than 30% year on year. "Cruising with Princess is more cost-effective than weekend city breaks, and you get the variety a cruise offers," he says.

A British Isles with Liverpool cruise, priced from £1,549 per person in May 2019, takes in Liverpool, Belfast, Greenock (the port for Glasgow), South Queensferry (for Edinburgh), Cobh and Dublin in Ireland, and St Peter Port in Guernsey.

Selected departures stay two days in Dublin or venture north to Kirkwall in the Orkneys, where tours visit the Ring of Brodgar (like Stonehenge, but smaller and you can get close to the monoliths), the stone-age settlement of Skara Brae and include a food-and-whisky-tasting adventure.

HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines has dropped its round-Britain



LEFT:
Cavern Club,
Liverpool

ABOVE LEFT:
St Peter Port,
Guernsey

**ABOVE
RIGHT:** CMV's
Columbus



LEFT: *Hebridean Princess* in Tobermory

BELOW: Cunard's *Queen Victoria*

→ sailings in favour of voyages around Scotland because so many of its passengers had done the former and wanted something different.

Clare Ward, director of product and customer service, says: "Around-Scotland itineraries enable guests to experience the lesser-explored, more inaccessible and remote parts of the country. Our Scottish guests also enjoy cruising around their homeland because many have not seen it from the water, which is often the best vantage point."

Among 2019 itineraries, a nine-night cruise round-trip from Liverpool in May visits Greenock, Tobermory, Ullapool, Kirkwall, Lerwick in the Shetland Islands and Invergordon, while an eight-night voyage from Liverpool in August will be in Edinburgh during the Military Tattoo.

Fred Olsen also has a seven-

night cruise around Ireland in September that calls at Belfast, Dublin, Cobh, Galway and Killybegs. From £1,049 per person.

Hebridean Island Cruises' 50-passenger *Hebridean Princess* sails around the Scottish islands round-trip from Oban or Greenock in Scotland and is selling out fast for 2019.

Cruises range from four to nine days and include themed departures – cycling over the Minch, Gastronomic Scotland,

Whisky Galore – as well as Footloose itineraries with guided walks or hikes most days. From £2,540 per person cruise-only for a seven-night Outlook on the Clyde cruise round-trip from Greenock, departing April 2, 2019.

Others sailing around the UK include Disney Cruise Line, which is sprinkling a little pixie dust over Dublin, Belfast, Greenock and Liverpool on a seven-night voyage from Dover in September 2019; and P&O Cruises, which has a 13-night west coast voyage from Southampton to Kirkwall and back in June 2019, and a 12-night sailing in August 2020.

Crystal Cruises has a 14-day golf-themed cruise from Dover in July 2020, which visits England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, from £5,207 per person.

Among more unusual calls, Seabourn is visiting Bantry in Ireland and Cowes on the Isle of

Wight on a 15-day voyage around Ireland from Dover, departing July 1, 2019, while Regent Seven Seas Cruises and Oceania Cruises are calling at Portland – the gateway to Stonehenge and Dorchester – on four round-Britain sailings next year.

Saga Cruises' *Spirit of Discovery* and *Saga Sapphire* will both also be visiting Portland next July – the latter's 11-night Highland Heritage sailing has an optional excursion to Abbotsbury Gardens for a live jazz concert.

Cunard has two British Isles cruises on *Queen Victoria* in 2019 – a west coast voyage from Southampton in June that visits Greenock, Oban, Kirkwall, Dublin, Liverpool, Cobh and St Peter Port, and a circumnavigation in August that includes calls at Newcastle, Invergordon and Liverpool. Both are 12 nights with prices from £1,499 per person. **TW**

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Around-Scotland itineraries enable guests to experience the more remote parts of the country