

# Talking *trends*

What will be driving demand for cruise bookings in 2026? Jane Archer finds out

Like fashion and food, travel is subject to shifting trends as customers' expectations and appetites adapt over time. Cruise is no exception, with lines leading the way by driving forward changes in their programmes, and responding to demand as guests' booking habits evolve. We take a look at the trends that will be shaping your clients' booking habits over the coming year. ➔



FROM LEFT: Great Temple of Ramses II, Abu Simbel, Egypt; AE Expeditions' *Douglas Mawson*; Alaska Fish House, Ketchikan; *Back to the Future: The Musical* on Royal Caribbean's *Star of the Seas*.  
PREVIOUS PAGE: Oceania Allura in Kotor, Montenegro



## MEDI-BRR-ANEAN?

Where do you suggest when clients ask for a cruise in winter? The Caribbean or Asia, perhaps? Probably not the Mediterranean, a region loved by the Brits in summer for its beaches, history, culture and fun-in-the-sun outlook. But if the newest cruise trend is anything to go by, that's exactly what agents should be recommending.

MSC Cruises and Viking have sold the Med over winter for years, but other brands have tried and failed, unable to sell the concept even if it means avoiding the high temperatures and crowds of the summer.

But that didn't stop Windstar Cruises trying again. It offered its first winter season in the Med in 2023-24, and was so successful that it has not only stayed, but has added more itineraries and overnight port calls.

It has also inspired Silversea and Azamara Cruises. The former is making its winter Med debut in the 2025-26 season, the latter in 2026-27.

Oceania Cruises has year-round sailings in the region in 2027-28.

Oceania's senior vice-president for international and consumer sales, Steve Odell, says they will appeal to guests who want to explore destinations they know well from a different point of view.

He adds: "They will also give gourmand guests a host of different local dishes and drinks to enjoy, as light tapas and refreshing aperitifs give way to hearty stews and mulled wines."

## TASTE OF ADVENTURE

If winter in the Med doesn't do it for clients, maybe they'd like an expedition cruise there instead? It might not be as exciting as penguin or polar bear-spotting in Antarctica and the Arctic, but it is a chance to see the region in a different way and get a taste of expedition without the extreme conditions.

"It's a way for travellers to experience our style of immersive

exploration, while making better use of our ships year-round," says Andrew Turner, AE Expeditions' director of sales for the EMEA region.

AE Expeditions is making its Med debut in summer 2026, joining National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions and Atlas Ocean Voyages, which offers epicurean expeditions that will include trips to farms, tapas makers and wine estates. Turner says AE Expeditions' Med focus is on culture, history and hidden coastlines.

"What remains consistent is our expert expedition team and excursions that bring travellers closer to the heart of each destination. We see real momentum as agents gain confidence in presenting an expedition-style product in such an accessible region," he says.

## DESTINATIONS ON THE RISE

Despite the recent unrest in neighbouring countries, Nile cruises that take passengers on a journey past



PICTURE: low-photo

ancient Egypt's temples and tombs are in huge demand, so much so that Viking is launching another two river ships there in 2026, while Travelmarvel is entering the market with new ship *Travelmarvel Sirius*.

"We're confident [Egypt] will become one of the most sought-after regions in our portfolio," says David Cox, Travelmarvel's chief executive.

Alaska is also hot stuff, prompting Princess Cruises and Holland America Line to base a record number of ships there in 2026 and others to start moving in. Azamara Cruises returns after seven years away and Virgin Voyages, MSC Cruises and Crystal make their debut.

"Our European guests have been awaiting the opportunity to sail to Alaska with MSC Cruises," says chief executive Gianni Onorato. The sailings are on *MSC Poesia*, now with an exclusive Yacht Club and Butcher's Cut steakhouse following a refurbishment in February.

## GOING SOLO

Solo cruising has come of age over the past few years as cruise lines have set aside single cabins, no longer expecting those travelling alone to reside only in inside cabins, and have reduced or waived single supplements.

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines, Crystal and Ambassador Cruise Line are among lines with individually priced single cabins rather than 100% supplements, while Saga Cruises and Riviera Travel have dedicated solo river cruises.

Riviera is going one stage further, setting aside river ship *George Eliot* exclusively for solo cruising from 2027.

"It will have just 68 passengers instead of the usual 132, so will be a more intimate experience," says Riviera's product director, Will Sarson.

## ENTERTAINING TIMES

At a cruise conference in 2009, delegates laughed when the then UK boss of MSC Cruises predicted that one day, Elton John would replace the

ubiquitous songs-from-the-shows acts on cruise ships.

They wouldn't laugh now. Elton might not have performed at sea – though new NCL show *Rocket Man: A Celebration of Elton John* comes close – but entertainment has come on in leaps and bounds. *Back to the Future: The Musical* is playing on Royal Caribbean's *Star of the Seas*, *Dirty Dancing* is on *MSC Virtuosa* and *Come from Away* is on Cunard's *Queen Elizabeth*. Gloria Gaynor has been entertaining Crystal passengers and in October 2026, lead singers from Wet Wet Wet and Spandau Ballet, Marti Pellow and Tony Hadley, will headline on an Ambassador Cruise Line voyage in Scandinavia.

Do any of these trends convince a client to cruise? Perhaps not when taken alone – but together, they offer options to entice new-to-cruise clients or give returning guests a reason to book again, and if that's the case, it's a trend that will last long after the latest fashions have been forgotten. ●