



WHAT'S ON TV?

Cruise-focused TV shows are ushering in a new opportunity for agents, says [Kaye Holland](#)

From top: Ambassador Cruise Line passengers Kerri-Anne and Julie, who feature in Channel 5's new series of *The Cruise: Fun-Loving Brits at Sea*; Susan Calman on *Emerald Sakara* in the Caribbean; filming on a HAL ship

PICTURES: Ambassador Cruise Line, Holland American Line, Emerald Cruises

Cruise TV shows – you can't escape them. As soon as *Supercruising: Life at Sea* – Holland America Line's eight-part series set on ships *Nieuw Statendam* and *Rotterdam* – finished airing in August on Channel 4, another season of *The Cruise: Fun-Loving Brits at Sea* began on Channel 5 in late September.

The fly-on-the-wall hit spent its first season with Princess Cruises but the mantle has now passed to Ambassador Cruise Line, with episode-linked offers for agents to promote across the 20-part daytime series.

Meanwhile, *Mystery Voyage*, a reality show filmed on board Virgin Voyages' newest ship, *Brilliant Lady*, will sail on to our screens before 2025 is out.

One thing is certain: the appetite for cruise TV shows is there. But do they help drive bookings?

SHOW BUSINESS

According to Chris Townson, managing director for the UK and Europe at Uniworld – the luxury river cruise line that took centre stage during a two-part episode of *Susan Calman's Cruise of a Lifetime*, broadcast on Channel 5 at the start of the year – the answer is 'yes'.

"In the week after [the programmes] aired, we saw an increase in organic search of over 400%, a 77% increase in web views and a 45% increase in newsletter sign-ups," he says.

"Importantly, we have also seen a year-on-year increase of over 200% in bookings and nearly 300% in revenue for our India product [the subject of the two episodes] specifically."

It's a view shared by Sarah Fowler, marketing director at Riviera Travel, another line that played a starring role in the Scottish comedian and presenter's popular cruise programme. During another two-parter that aired in 2024,

Calman travelled along the Douro River on board *Douro Elegance*.

The result? "A 100% uptick versus the prior year for our Douro itinerary in the two weeks following the shows," says Fowler. "The exposure also generated countless conversations with our audience and contributed to the Douro being one of our top-selling itineraries for 2024."

Calman has also featured other lines in recent episodes, including Emerald Cruises in the Caribbean and Fred Olsen Cruise Lines in Norway.

BRAND AID

Clearly, when a cruise TV show succeeds, it not only builds brand awareness but also yields profits – something to



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which Paul Beale, sales vice-president for the UK and Ireland at Regent Seven Seas Cruises, can attest. Two of the ultra-luxury line's ships – *Seven Seas Splendor* and *Seven Seas Explorer* – were the focus of Channel 5 shows *Secrets of the World's Most Expensive Cruise Ship* (2023) and *Building the World's Most Luxurious Cruise Ship* (2016) respectively.

"Following the programmes, we saw an uplift in enquiries and web traffic, and to this day, we meet guests on board who tell us they were inspired to book after watching the shows," says Beale.

Holland America's recent *Supercruising: Life at Sea* is another

good case in point. Karen Farndell, the line's associate vice-president of sales and marketing for the UK and Ireland, says since the series concluded, Holland America has seen "a really encouraging uplift in website visits, in particular with people looking at cruises to the featured destinations such as the Panama Canal, Caribbean and Canary Islands".

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Of course, TV success means that there are now expectations on agents to maximise interest and turn viewers' curiosity into a confirmed booking. Make no mistake: inspiration without a clear next step rarely leads to action.

Tracy Clenshaw, head of commercial at

Fred Olsen Travel, has this advice for agents: "Contact your customers ahead of time and recommend they tune in – and don't forget to watch the shows yourself, so that you have a good understanding of the product and experience.

"Go all out on social media at the time of transmission and utilise compelling calls to action.

Craft an engaging email campaign – don't 'spray and pray' – that provides transparent pricing. And be sure to respond rapidly to any enquiries."

Paul Frost, meanwhile, head of product at Iglu Cruise, stresses the need for high-quality visuals and content "which not only attracts visitors but also helps build trust – essential for conversion".

His advice to agents ahead of the next wave of cruise TV shows? "Reach out to the respective cruise line for assets and information you can use now."

In other words, get a move on or – pardon the pun – risk missing the boat. ●