

Set sail for adventure

BRITAIN TO NORWAY

Some of the most luxurious cruising itineraries on the map set sail from the British Isles. Avoiding the expense of arranging group flights, it can be a good cost-saver. Celebrity Cruises is offering a nine-day jaunt to the Norwegian Fjords, setting sail from Southampton on 29 April 2017 with five stops along the way.

The first full day is spent at sea, but with so much to do on board delegates will be spoilt for choice. Like a 'country club on the ocean', the Canyon ranch SpaClub will eat up hours of relaxation time, while Champagne sits on ice at the Martini Bar ready for toasting as the sun sets.

The first stop is in Bergen, Norway, where a funicular ride to the summit of the 1,000ft Mount Floyen is rewarded with an ice-cold beer at the top. Descend to the city's famous fish market, located in the 11th-century harbour, for lunch and let the group explore Bergen's World Heritage sites.

Day four and five are spent in Flam and Geiranger. Alongside the world's longest and deepest fjord, the mountains and waterfalls that surround Flam are mesmerising, while Geiranger is all about action, so take a kayak trip to the famous Seven Sisters waterfall.

Cruise operators are devising increasingly imaginative itineraries in response to C&I demand.
By Jack Carter

Amazing experiences (above)
Azamara Club Cruises



The penultimate port of call is Alesund, the Nordic answer to Saint-Tropez. Brimming with incredible views across the archipelago and unique Art Nouveau architecture, it is an unassuming yet unforgettable stop on the trip.

Stavanger is the final visit before the *Celebrity Eclipse* sails back to Southampton. The Norwegian city is today most popular for the Pulpit Rock, located a short boat trip away to Lysefjord. A selfie atop the 604m-high cliff edge will no doubt be a lasting memory from the voyage.

ITALY AND THE FRENCH RIVIERA

Azamara Club Cruises' European voyage departs in June 2017, taking in the highlights of the French Riviera and beyond. The three-night journey sets sail from Nice in the evening and makes the nighttime sail to Portofino in the Genoa region of southern Italy, arriving at 9am the following day.

With a late departure from the coastal town, groups will have the whole day to explore the harbour or the hiking trails in the Portofino

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National Park before reconvening for lunch in one of the many boutique restaurants. Da Puny is considered one of the best spots on the harbour for seafood and other indulgent Italian dishes.

Delegates can choose to spend their afternoon wandering through the fishing village or head back to the ship to enjoy the Mediterranean sunshine before dinner at one of its two restaurants.

The next day, wake up in Saint-Tropez. The town is as much a draw for culture vultures as it is Hollywood A-Listers and no wonder, because it is one of Europe's most beautiful seaside resorts.

Groups can split their day up with morning visits to La Ponche (aka Old Town), the heartbeat of Saint-Tropez Vieux Port, and the 16th-century Citadel, which watches over the harbour, before hitting the beaches for some relaxation.

An evening in Saint-Tropez is a terrific opportunity to impress delegates with Azamara's Azamazing Evenings. You can work with the cruise company to put together a bespoke experience, which could include a private gala dinner at the Citadel or a beach party with a luxury yacht.

Amazing experiences (above)
Azamara Club Cruises

The experience is included in the cost for incentive groups, so it is possible to plan an unforgettable evening before the journey back to Nice.

CARIBBEAN QUEST

In April 2017, Royal Caribbean International's luxury liner *Brilliance of the Seas* sets sail from Tampa, Florida, heading to the Grand Cayman islands and stopping off in Mexico on its return.

George Town, Grand Cayman's largest island, won't be reached until day three of the voyage, which leaves plenty of time to enjoy the ship. Delegates can find unrivalled views of the Caribbean from atop the rock-climbing wall or enjoy some rest and recuperation at the luxury spa and Solarium pool.

Hop off the ship and straight onto the white sands of George Town, where Stingray City has perfect conditions for snorkeling and diving among the lurking residents. The southern rays are friendly and playful, according to local DMC Red Sail Cayman, which frequently takes groups to hand-feed them.

Once back on board, the ship exits the Caribbean to the west and heads for Cozumel, Mexico.

The island is awash with tropical wildlife and with a full day on the 'Island of Swallows', groups can use it to explore the Mexican jungle or take a day visit to Cancun.

The final full day is spent cruising back to Florida, and there's still plenty on board for groups to experience, from the West End-style shows in the theatre, salsa dancing and duty-free shopping – not to mention the 16 bars and lounges for a final toast of bubbly.



BUYER VERDICT

MARK TAYLOR

Client relationship director, EMEA, BI Worldwide

"It's a brilliant option for clients who want to be able to control every thing"

Cruising is becoming a very popular option for the corporate market, with many providers taking the sector far more seriously and increasing options

on board for groups. It's a brilliant option for clients who want to be able to control everything – they can get exclusive use of the ship and

the itinerary can be tailored to their needs.

We work with high-end carriers like Silversea Cruises and Seabourne Cruise Line, which both take groups of 250-450 on an exclusive basis. For smaller group of 40-50, Silversea gave our client a whole deck of its ship exclusively and was still able

to make the incentive totally bespoke to us.

Typically, everything is included in the cost, from fuel, port charges and F&B, so the budget is easier to manage. If delegates want a glass of Champagne at the bar or if we want to arrange an impromptu drinks reception, that's fine.

However, the real selling point is that it allows groups to visit destinations the client ordinarily wouldn't go for. Groups can go to ports in Croatia and Italy and create a wonderful experience that would be very difficult with 400

people by land. Smaller ports of call often don't have the infrastructure to give planners everything they need but cruising opens a lot of them up.

In the past, we have done cruises to the Baltics where delegates saw St Petersburg, Helsinki, and Stockholm.

We arranged for guests to stay overnight in St Petersburg and for the Hermitage Museum to stay open late for a private ballet performance in the theatre. We then took over a palace and created a Russian-themed night of ice sculptures and vodka.