

LIVES OF THE LINERS: CRUISING, CRUISE SHIPS & THE COVID PANDEMIC



From Bill Miller

March 2021

Mon Mar 19th West Coast: In a big development for West Coast cruising, Royal Caribbean last Wednesday announced plans to base a ship in Los Angeles — something it hasn't done in a decade. The world's largest cruise line said its 3,386-passenger *Navigator of the Seas* would sail year-round to Mexico from the city starting in June 2022, offering a range of three- to seven-night voyages.



Costa Cruises announced that it will start cruising again in May, citing restrictions in place in Europe and other European countries to contain COVID-19. In line with the new plan, the *Costa Smeralda*'s departure from Italy is planned for May 1, with three- and four-day mini-cruises or alternatively a seven-day cruise, calling at Savona, La Spezia, Civitavecchia, Naples, Messina and Cagliari. From June 12, the *Costa Smeralda* will return to sailing one-week cruises in the Western Mediterranean, with visits to Italy (Savona, Civitavecchia and Palermo), France (Marseille) and Spain (Barcelona and Palma de Mallorca).

The departure date of *Costa Luminosa*, the second Costa ship scheduled to resume service, is now postponed to May 16 from Trieste,

and the following day from Bari, confirming its program of one-week cruises in Greece and Croatia.



Tue Mar 23rd: AIDA Cruises is back and cruising as the *AIDAperla* has departed on the first cruise for the German brand in 2021 in the Canaries. Carnival Corporation's German brand will offer week-long cruises in the Canaries on the *AIDAperla*, departing from Gran Canaria. The voyage then features a sea day, call in La Palma, an overnight call in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, and stops in Fuerteventura and Lanzarote before heading back to Gran Canaria.



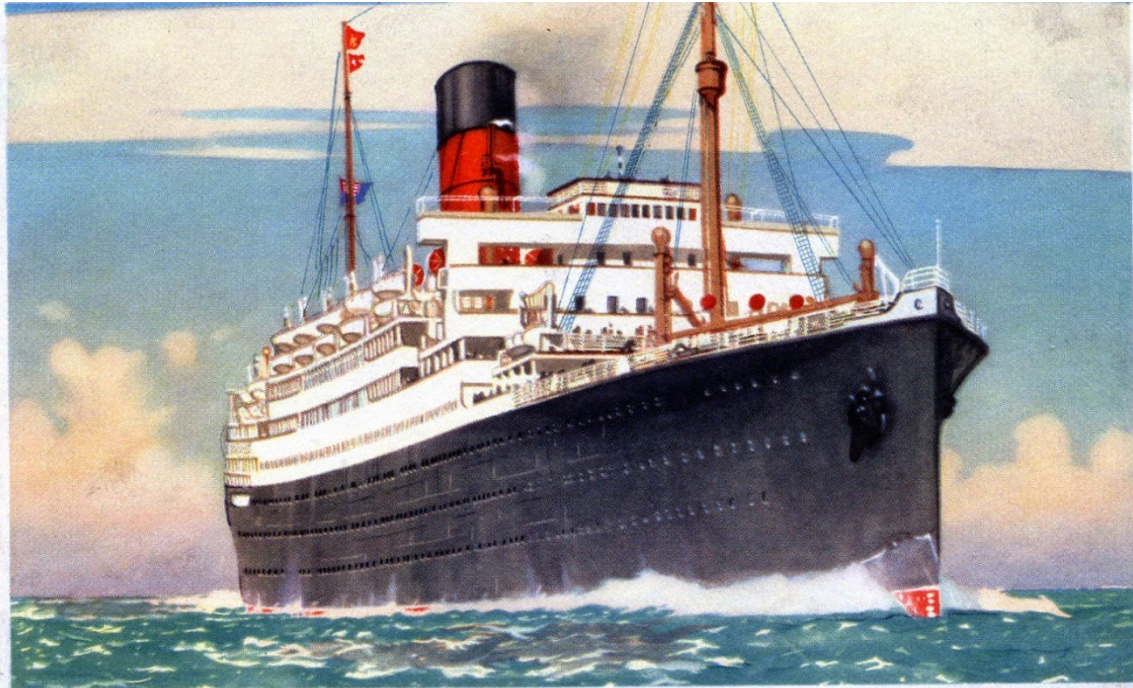
Wed Mar 24th The American Society of Travel Advisors called on the Biden administration to allow cruising, citing rising COVID-19 vaccination rates and the fact that other activities are resuming.



Italy: Fincantieri is back with a big bang! The Italian shipbuilder has a very healthy order book for 2021 and beyond – and sees a quick return to profit amidst the pandemic. Fincantieri is the biggest and busiest producer of cruise ships in the world.



Cunard: Get your flapper dresses ready — or your Jay Gatsby-esque pinstripe suits. Cruising, 1920s-style, is about to make a comeback. In an announcement this week that will no doubt excite ocean liner history buffs, the storied Cunard Line said it would operate two around-the-world voyages in 2023 that will mirror its first world-circling trips of the 1920s.



Cunard R.M.S. "Samaria"

Designed as a celebration of the UK-based brand's first two circumnavigations of the globe in 1923 — which also were the first circumnavigation of the globe by any line — the voyages will feature many of the same port calls that were on Cunard's first two around-the-world sailings. Cunard's original around-the-world sailings took place on Cunard's *Laconia* (above) and *Samaria* — two grand ocean liners of the 1920s. Both of the vessels had just debuted in 1922.



For 2023, Cunard's 2,081-passenger *Queen Victoria* will visit many of the ports that *Laconia* visited on its first-ever around-the-world cruise, including Hong Kong; New York; Singapore; Cabo San Lucas, Mexico; Colombo, Sri Lanka; San Francisco; Hilo and Honolulu in Hawaii; Manila; and Naples, Italy. Other destinations on the schedule include Aruba, Jordan, Tonga and a full transit of the Panama Canal.



Add Bermuda to the list of places where Royal Caribbean is restarting cruises. The world's largest cruise line on Tuesday said it would begin

seven-night sailings to the Bahamas out of Bermuda's Royal Naval Dockyard as soon as June 26.

The unusual routing, which the line will offer through August, will be Royal Caribbean's first foray into out-of-Bermuda cruises in its 52-year history. The trips will take place on one of Royal Caribbean's smallest vessels, the 2,514-passenger *Vision of the Seas*. Like new voyages out of the Bahamas starting on June 12 that Royal Caribbean announced a few days ago, the Bermuda sailings will not originate in or involve any stops at U.S. ports. This means they will not require the approval of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). They only require the approval of officials in Bermuda and the Bahamas, which the line now has. The CDC has blocked cruise ships that carry more than 250 people from sailing in U.S. waters since March of 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. The agency has not yet announced when cruise lines will be able to restart operations in U.S. waters.



Thu Mar 25th The cruise industry is ready to sail. And it's calling out the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for what it views as

unfair treatment more than a year after being shut down by the health authority in U.S. waters during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cruise Lines International Association, the industry's leading trade organization, is urging the CDC to lift its "framework for conditional sailing order" to allow cruising to resume in phases by the start of July.

"The outdated CSO, which was issued almost five months ago, does not reflect the industry's proven advancements and success operating in other parts of the world, nor the advent of vaccines, and unfairly treats cruises differently," said Kelly Craighead, president and CEO of the association, which represents 95% of ocean-going cruise capacity, said in a statement.

Celebrity Cruises announced its return to cruising in Europe today as the *Celebrity Apex* will make its debut in Greece this summer beginning June 19, sailing roundtrip week-long cruises from Athens.

The new ship will call in Rhodes and Santorini, Greece; Limassol, Cyprus; and Haifa and Jerusalem, Israel. The sailings will open for booking on March 30. The *Celebrity Apex* will sail with all crew and guests above the age of 18 vaccinated against COVID-19, and those under the age of 18 with negative PCR test results. The announcement comes just days after Celebrity Cruises announced its Caribbean comeback with seven-night summer cruises departing from St. Maarten also beginning in June.



Silversea: Did these people tell their bosses they're taking a long vacation? Silversea says it's sold every spot on a five-month cruise around the world, set to sail around the Southern Hemisphere in 2023.



The Monaco-based line, which is owned by Royal Caribbean, announced the news Tuesday, teasing the quick bookings for the *South Side Story - All the World's a Stage* trip as the most successful in the brand's history. The *Silver Shadow* (above) ship will depart Sydney,

Australia, on January 10, 2023, making stops in 66 destinations in 34 countries on five continents, with a final destination of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, set for May 28.

Cunard is reporting strong bookings for its long winter cruises in 2022.



Fri Mar 26th Royal Caribbean International has announced a new program of seven-night cruises onboard the *Jewel of the Seas* from Limassol, Cyprus and around the coastlines of Greece and Cyprus starting from July 10.



Container Cargo: According to the latest figures (as of last Friday), there was 401 container ships totaling 3.63 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) on order. The order book is 15.3% of the on-the-water fleet's capacity measured in TEUs, up from a multi-decade low of just 9.4% in mid-2020.



Queen Mary: Dr Nelson Arnstein reports: “Long Beach’s *Queen Mary* has seen many operators struggle to make the historic ocean liner profitable over the decades.

There was Joe Prevatil, who signed a lease to run the ship in 1993 and later filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy when the city demanded several million dollars in unpaid rent. There was Save the Queen LLC, which bought the lease out of bankruptcy and then defaulted on its loan in 2009. There was even the Walt Disney Co., which once operated the ship but bailed on its lease after a 1992 marine survey identified \$27 million of needed repairs.

Long Beach has owned the *Queen Mary* since it arrived from England in 1967 as a hotel and tourist attraction. It leases the ship to operators who are responsible for its care and daily maintenance. And now the ship could see yet another new caretaker when the *Queen Mary*’s lease goes up for auction next month after its current operator, Eagle Hospitality Trust, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in January. In a March 9th announcement, Singapore-based Eagle Hospitality Trust said it will sell its interest in 15 of the 18 hotels in its portfolio, including the *Queen Mary*, Sheraton Pasadena and Holiday Inn Anaheim for a starting price of \$470 million in an auction set tentatively for May 20.”





Suez Canal: Marine traffic through the Suez Canal remained blocked on Friday for the fourth consecutive day, with dozens of ships stuck at both the north and south entrances to the shortest route between Asia and Africa. Efforts to dislodge one of the world's largest cargo vessels, Evergreen Line's 220,000-ton, 1,312-ft long *Ever Given*, stuck sideways across the narrow canal since Tuesday, were picking up.



EVERGREEN



Virgin Voyages: Restart dates are now posted as July 1, 2021 for *Scarlet Lady*; and for its second ship, *Valiant Lady*, November 14, 2021.

Continuing the trend of vaccine mandates, Virgin Voyages announced that it would require all passengers and crew to have a COVID-19 vaccine before sailing when cruises resume in the U.S. The move makes Virgin Voyages the first mainstream cruise line to implement a vaccine requirement for passengers and crew in the U.S., although cruise inoculation mandates have begun in other countries.



Sat Mar 27th Cunard is offering UK guests the opportunity to spend this summer at sea, with a series of UK voyages on board *Queen Elizabeth*. Voyages will be round-trip from Southampton, between July and October 2021, and comprise of British Isles scenic cruising and special Sun Voyages, sailing to wherever the sun shines brightest.

10 British Isles Voyages and three Sun Voyages, lasting between three and twelve nights, are available. Guests will be able to experience the

most luxurious summer at sea enjoying exquisite fine dining, the onboard spa and spectacular entertainment while having the opportunity to see the UK's coastline from a unique vantage point. British Isles Voyages include scenic sailings along Britain's coastline including The Jurassic Coast, England's only natural UNESCO world heritage site, Cornwall including Land's End and Scotland including the Isle of Arran, Mull of Kintyre and Sound of Mull. Four voyages will make various port calls, including Liverpool, Greenock, Invergordon, Belfast, Newcastle as well as a maiden call for Cunard's fleet to the Welsh port of Holyhead.



Carnival Cruise Lines' president said in a video message to travel agents that the brand has no plans to move its ships from their U.S. homeports.

"I have always said that Carnival Cruise Line is America's cruise line," she said.

"We sail from 14 U.S. homeports, 50 percent of our itineraries are less than seven-day sailings, and a significant number of our guests drive to

their Carnival cruise vacation. We also sail more families with children than any other cruise line. And as you know so far the vaccines are not approved for anyone under the age of 16. Duffy said as more Americans are vaccinated, her focus is on securing a decision (from the CDC) to allow for a resumption of cruising from U.S. homeports, consistent with other forms of travel returning for the summer. She noted that she is optimistic travel will resume in time for the summer.



American Queen Riverboats resumed sailing mid-month and this week, after a year since its completion at Gulf Island Shipyard last March, American Countess of American Queen Steamboat Co. is up and running. And that means a lot to river towns like Natchez.

Steady flow of visitors: The economic impact is 'significant,' Mayor Dan Gibson said. 'Cruises provide a steady flow of visitors to our area on an annual basis.' This helps support businesses like the historic homes,

restaurants, shops, tours, carriage rides and the growing offering of African American history tourism. Natchez loves the *American Queen* and we had the *American Duchess* last week as the first paddlewheeler back, and I'm thankful we now have *American Countess*,' Gibson said. 'Three of the finest boats in America, cruising the Lower Mississippi and coming to Natchez every week.' With the three — after *American Queen* starts later this year, and *American Countess* gets up to full capacity, 245 passengers — that will be 832 AQSC passengers weekly, plus crew.

'This means large numbers for Natchez,' the mayor said.

Southern hospitality: Gibson was aboard *American Countess* this week for his first cruise of any kind, and he extolled the boat's library where he remotely conducted mayoral affairs, the Sun Deck walking track, the dining room with its 'exquisite crystal chandeliers,' the 'breathtaking Grand Lobby, impressive yet also very comfortable,' the staff and entertainers and the Southern hospitality. He even took a turn at the piano.





Disney Cruise Line has become the latest cruise operator to confirm UK home sailings in summer 2021. According to a press release, United Kingdom residents will be able to sail on the new *Disney Magic* at Sea "staycation" sailings from UK ports this summer for a limited time. Featuring enchanted entertainment and with multiple layers of health and safety measures, the *Disney Magic* (below) plans to sail mostly two- and three-night voyages, as well as limited four-night sailings round-trip from London Tilbury, Newcastle, Liverpool and Southampton.



Up in the Skies! Airlines are expanding their schedules and more passengers resume traveling. Chicago-based United Airlines announced a significant increase in domestic and international flights but it's still a fraction of pre-pandemic service. The airline announced it will fly 58% of its domestic schedule and 46% of its international schedule this May compared to May 2019.



Above: Painting of air/liner contrast 1957 by Stephen Card

End of the Line! Nick Braddock reports: The *Columbus*, formerly with CMV, arrived at Alang yesterday – but as the renamed *Colus*. Another one gone and soon to be rubble!



Return to Cruising! It's been a confusing week in the ongoing saga between the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and cruise lines hoping to resume operations in North America. The CDC has said it wasn't the sole actor holding things back. She

suggested that the Department of Transportation and other agencies were also part of the decision making. That was news to the cruise lines, who have been waiting for direction from the agency, under its Conditional Framework for Sailing order for the past six months.

With no movement coming, the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) called on the CDC to drop the order and allow a phased resumption of cruising from U.S. ports by the beginning of July.

The lack of any action by the CDC has effectively banned all sailings in the largest cruise market in the world. Cruising is the only sector of the U.S. economy that remains prohibited, even as most others have opened or continued to operate throughout the pandemic.



The outdated CSO, which was issued almost five months ago, does not reflect the industry's proven advancements and success operating in other parts of the world, nor the advent of vaccines, and unfairly treats cruises differently.

In response, the agency simply reiterated its former position that the order remains in effect until Nov. 1, 2021. Returning to passenger cruising is a phased approach to mitigate the risk of spreading Covid-19. Details for the next phase of the CSO are currently under interagency review. What it didn't mention: under the order, the agency can drop it at any time.



New Face: Scheduled to debut in the Mediterranean, the *MSC Seashore* (below) will arrive in Miami on Nov 17th. Described as giving guests an enhanced version of the *MSC Seaside*, the *MSC Seashore* will feature some new venues, more massive outdoor spaces and the largest MSC Yacht Club. Starting in November, the *MSC Seashore* will be offering 7-night Eastern and Western Caribbean and Bahamas cruise itineraries. These will include stops at Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve.



Out of an old shoe box (top) – Busy day at Nassau, 1988 – from the left: Starward, Carnivale, Dolphin, Emerald Seas, Sunward II, Galileo & Starship Oceanic; and (bottom) the Northern Star at Circular Quay, Sydney, 1968 (Bill Barber Collection)

Thank you to all our readers, correspondents, those “agents” in faraway places!



