

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



From Bill Miller

April 2021

Sun Apr 11th St Vincent: The *Serenade of the Seas* from Royal Caribbean International arrived in St. Vincent on Friday to help evacuate residents following the eruption of the La Soufrière volcano. It's one of two ships on the scene from Royal Caribbean Group, as the company also sent the *Celebrity Reflection* to help, while Carnival

Cruise Line sent two ships as well: the *Carnival Legend* and *Carnival Paradise*.



Venice Seems there have been lots of cheers about keeping big cruise ships out of Venice.



Mon Apr 12th Resumptions! From our keen agent here in the US, Charles Dragonette reports: “The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offered a rare glimmer of hope for the cruise industry this week, with the agency that the latest aspect of its phased return to U.S. cruising ‘aligns with the desire for resumption of passenger operations in the United States expressed by many major cruise ship operators and travelers, hopefully by mid-summer’.”

The comment came only after hard criticism from the cruise industry followed an announcement on Apr 2nd that the agency was releasing technical guidance to inform port agreements and deal with Covid-19 outbreaks. With no indication regarding when cruise lines might finally receive the green light to sail—or even when they could begin to conduct simulated sailings, or “test cruises,” to assess new health protocols—it barely advanced the industry’s stalled position.

The Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) called the instructions “disappointing” and “largely unworkable,” noting that before the pandemic the cruise industry supported almost 450,000 American jobs and contributed some \$56 billion annually.



In several ways, the CDC’s updates may be too little, too late. Many cruise lines, fed up with waiting, are ditching the U.S. entirely—at least for their busy summer seasons—and moving that lucrative industry offshore to ports around the Caribbean. Since Crystal Cruises introduced the tactic on Mar 11th, similar announcements have been pouring in from nearly every major line: Royal Caribbean, Celebrity Cruises, Norwegian Cruise Line, Windstar Cruises, and even Viking. All plan to restart business in the region this summer.



As a result, it's Caribbean nations, not the CDC, setting the tone for a safe return to cruising.

Some, such as Bermuda, are limiting the number of cruise passengers; on that island, only 3,000 visitors can disembark weekly. Others, including Anguilla—which has earned recognition for having a remarkably small number of Covid cases during the pandemic's duration—are requiring that all shore excursions be limited to specific parts of the island and be run only by approved, Covid-compliant vendors.

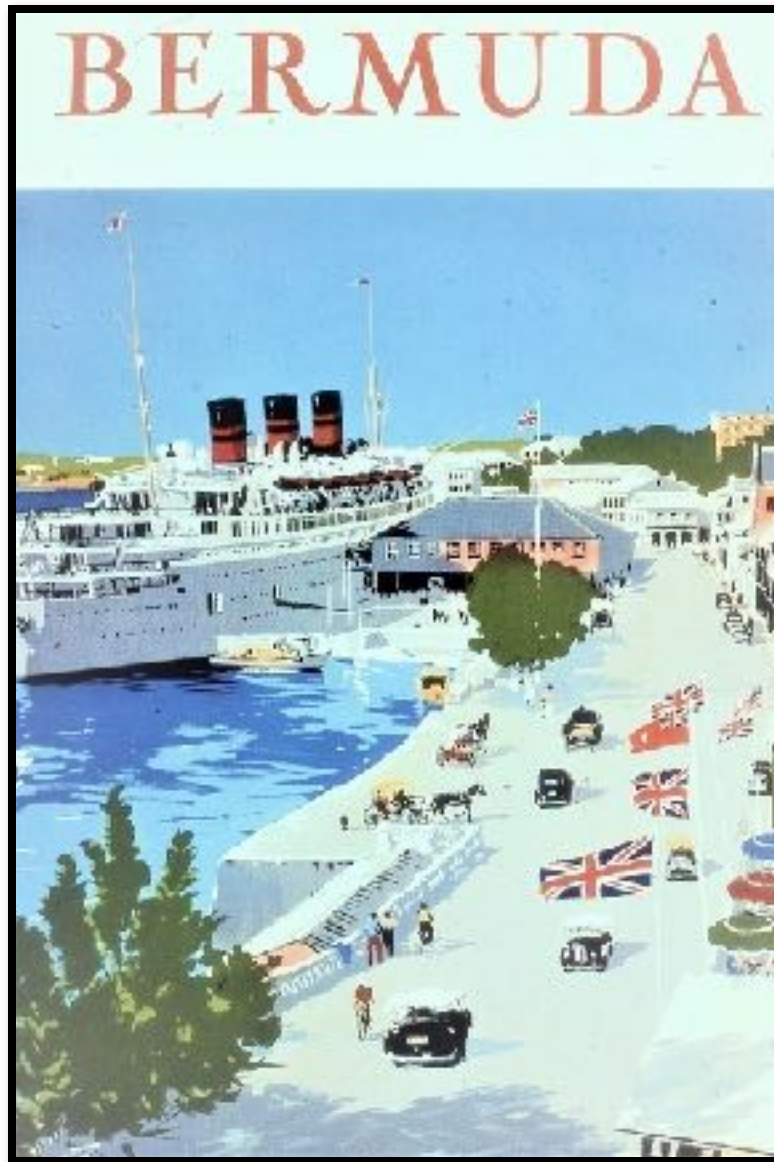
One requirement has been consistent across the board: vaccines for all adult guests and crew.



Tue Apr 13th More on Restarting! And more from the astute Charles Dragonette: Restarts for cruising will come with known and unknown risks. In Antigua and Barbuda, as well as other islands, the resumption of tourism and the return of higher numbers of nationals have sent Covid-19 cases soaring. Poor access to vaccines in some countries means that locals are exposed to greater risk than the traveling public. While the prospect of transmission among the vaccinated set has proven to present a low risk, the CDC continues to recommend against large group settings, a probable reason why it has yet to approve cruising from U.S. shores.

But money talks! For Caribbean countries, allowing vaccinated cruisers is a seemingly low risk that comes with significant economic rewards.

Bermuda is estimating a potential economic boost this summer of more than \$40 million if it can get three ships to use it as their primary port. That's far short of the \$170 million in economic benefit the British territory has reaped from its typical average of 185 ship calls per year, but it beats the island's rewards from the four cruise ships that visited in 2020. Royal Caribbean's 2,500-passenger *Vision of the Seas* will be based in Bermuda from June to August for seven-night sailings to the cruise company's private Bahamas island, "Perfect Day at CocoCay". Itineraries include an overnight docking in Bermuda so cruise passengers have time to explore the island—and spend money. Also sailing from Bermuda will be a vessel from Viking Ocean Cruises.



Below: The Dock Yard in Bermuda



St Maarten has also jumped on the opportunity to host ships that might normally sail from Miami and other U.S. ports. The Netherlands island territory welcomed 1.6 million cruise passengers in 2019 and is anxious to get back to business.

Homeporting will be an important step in the recovery of the island's economy. Celebrity Cruises' 2,220-passenger *Celebrity Millennium* will sail weekly from St Maarten this summer on routes to the Southern Caribbean.

Belw: St Maarten in busier times.



Of the five islands homeporting ships this summer, all have so far required vaccines, forcing the hands of cruise lines that were not already planning to enact the requirement.

There will be a zero-tolerance policy for rule-breakers, and even small offenses will get violators sent back to the ship.

Bermuda's Ministry of Health has developed a step-by-step process in the event a passenger tests positive, Burt says. This includes a pre-arranged isolation and quarantine accommodation for 14 days in Bermuda, with close monitoring and care from a local doctor appointed by the cruise line.

Similarly, St Maarten has made shots the backbone of its health precautions. Vaccines will be essential for passengers and crew, as well as the local community, in order for the return of cruise ships. Government officials envision inoculated passengers can explore the

territory freely as long as they respect standard public health policies such as wearing masks and social distancing.

Those policies have encouraged small ship line Windstar Cruises to sail its recently stretched all-suite 312-passenger *Star Breeze*, on sailings from St Maarten to ports that include Saint Barthélemy, Jost Van Dyke, and Anguilla. The vessel would normally spend the summer in Europe.



The president of Regent Cruises noted, “If you get sick on our ship with Covid, we will put you in a hospital, we’ll pay your bills, and we will make sure you get home. We’re not going to drop you off at the side of the road! Trying to counter images of Covid-exposed passengers stranded at sea or in unexpected ports at the start of the pandemic. Regent notes, “It’ll be the safest leisure activity on the planet.”



TUI Cruises has carried more than 84,000 passengers since resuming last summer with just four COVID-19 cases that were handled without disruption. TUI is Germany's 2nd largest cruise operator following Carnival-owned AIDA.

Below: TUI's giant, 4,000-passenger Mein Schiff 3 at Aruba



Rising Return! The return of cruising gained even more momentum last week with Viking Cruises (below) announcing its *Viking Orion* for Bermuda departures and Virgin Voyages its *Scarlet Lady* for Portsmouth.





Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines is today (Apr 9th) celebrating one year since it set sail on its first Virtual Cruise, as it looks ahead to a return to sailing with a new-look fleet this summer. Fred. Olsen set sail on its first virtual cruise on Apr 9th 2020 on a Norwegian fjords voyage that celebrated the line's heritage. Since then, it has set sail on 51 further virtual cruises, with destinations including the UK, Iceland, Caribbean, Canary Islands and a World Cruise, to name a few.



Bahamas Paradise Cruise Line has announced resumption of cruising and will be accepting bookings for sailings starting Jul 2nd.



Wed Apr 14th Saga Cruises has announced that its inaugural launch of the *Spirit of Adventure*, as well as three of the four British Isles cruises on the *Spirit of Discovery* were sold out only two weeks after going on sale. The British cruise line is geared to the over 50s. The first cruise departs from London/Tilbury on Jul 26th.

The itinerary for 15 nights visits Newcastle, Newhaven, Dundee, Kirkwall, Orkney Islands, Ullapool, Cruise St Kilda, Greenock, Belfast, Douglas, Holyhead, Bristol and Falmouth.

UK cruising: Other lines such as P&O, Cunard, Royal Caribbean, Celebrity & Disney are reporting very strong bookings for 4-7 night cruises only for vaccinated UK citizens.



Fri Apr 16th News from MSC: One of the world's biggest cruise lines, MSC Cruises, announced on Thursday it would resume operations with more than half its fleet over the next three months. The 18-ship brand already has restarted sailings out of Italy with one ship, *MSC Grandiosa*. But, it now plans to have at least 10 ships sailing by Aug. 1.

For now, all 10 of the ships will operate in Europe, where government officials have been more open to a resumption of cruising in recent months than officials in some other regions of the world, including North America. The governments of both Canada and the United States continue to ban cruising from their ports due to worries about the spread of COVID-19.



Viking Ocean: Fincantieri has delivered the new *Viking Venus* to Viking ahead of the ship's debut in the UK in May. The 930-guest ship was delivered on Thursday in Ancona. It's the seventh in a series of up to 16 930-guest ships being built for the Torstein Hagen-led cruise company. The *Viking Star* was delivered in 2015 and was quickly followed by the *Viking Sea*, *Sky*, *Sun*, *Orion* and *Jupiter*, with another nine ships set to follow, plus two 378-guest expedition ships from Fincantieri-owned VARD Shipyard.



More on Re-Starting! The continuing negotiations between cruise lines and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) took a few more steps this week, although nothing solid toward answering the question that all cruisers have -- when are we going to sail?

Words from Holland America: “As Holland America Line moves closer to the 150th Anniversary of our founding in 2023, this past year has taught us the importance of celebrating the smallest of milestones. So, we’re proudly commemorating our 148th Anniversary on April 18, 2021. As one of the longest-serving and most experienced cruise lines in the world, Holland America Line has grown into an award-winning, premium cruise line. Though transportation and shipping were the mainstays of our business in the 19th century, in 1895 we offered our first vacation cruise. Today, we are proud to operate 10 ships that visit more than 500 ports across all seven continents.”



“The next big milestone is the introduction of a new ship to the fleet in July 2021. The *Rotterdam* (below), the third Pinnacle Class ship for our cruise line, joins sisters *Nieuw Statendam* and *Koningsdam*. The name has special meaning — Holland America Line’s first ship was *Rotterdam*, which sailed its maiden voyage from Rotterdam, the Netherlands, to New York City, Oct. 15, 1872. This ship will be the seventh to bear the name for Holland America Line.”





Out of the old shoebox: Above: The *Cunard Countess* & *Cunard Princess* at San Juan

Below: The *Norway*.



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