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A record two million cruises were taken by British and Irish customers last year, a 2% rise on 2017, showing how cruising is now a mainstream holiday choice for many people. These figures were revealed last month by the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) at their conference in Southampton.

The increasing popularity of cruise holidays results from the diversity of product available, to suit a wider range of customers. Each cruise line has a different personality, which appeals to a specific market segment. That personality drives the design of the ship, the activities on board, the service style, the destinations, and indeed the price. Given the massive and varied choice, it's not surprising that more than 75% of customers seek the advice of a travel agent to help them select a cruise line, and choose the ship and the voyage which best suits their interests, tastes and budget.

CLIA provides an important link between the cruise lines and the travel trade, providing education and facilitating contacts. The three-day event in Southampton involved two dozen cruise lines and attracted more than 750 travel agents. For me, the highlights were the ship visits on Celebrity Edge and Queen Mary 2. The following weekend, Seabourn invited me on board their ship Ovation, moored on the Thames at Greenwich. These three ships are spectacular, but quite different to each other, so I was fascinated to explore and discover the distinct personality of each ship.

The Ultimate Recycling Project: Airbus A380

This month, I bring my 33-year career in aerospace to an end and leave VAS Aero Services. My final project is to manage the disassembly and recycling of two Airbus A380 airliners. Several people have asked about this project, so I would like to share some insight and photos.

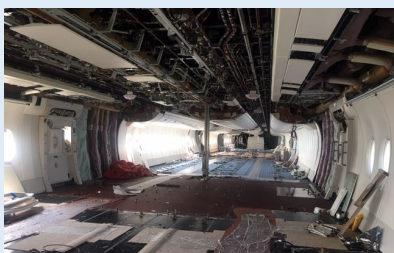


The A380's were delivered to Singapore Airlines in 2007. Each flew over 5,000 flights, that's more than 43,000 flying hours, carrying almost 2,000,000 passengers.

At the end of the lease, the aircraft were flown to Tarbes, southwest France, returned to the owner, a German leasing company, and consigned to VAS for recycling.

How to recycle such a beast? The first task was to remove the four engines, which were re-delivered to the manufacturer Rolls-Royce to be overhauled and leased to other airlines.

Next, strip the interior, removing seats, galleys, and lavatories, which were purchased by another A380 operator for use as spare parts.



Mechanics then followed the instructions in the Airbus maintenance manuals, to remove instruments from the cockpit, and components from the electrical, hydraulic and pneumatic systems. Six thousand items are removed from each aircraft. Each one inspected on-site, then sent to an authorised repair shop for test and refurbishment, before being certified as airworthy for use on other A380's.



The greatest challenge was to raise the 270 tonne aircraft on



jacks and safely drop the five huge undercarriage legs onto a handling trolley. The aircraft was then lowered onto a specially designed cradle, allowing it to be

moved to a designated cutting area where the metal structure will be sliced into smaller pieces to be recycled.



Quiz: What were the final ports of call for the Queen Mary, the Queen Elizabeth and the QE2?



RMS Queen Mary 2

Few travel experiences evoke the nostalgia of luxury travel quite like a voyage on an ocean liner. Cunard's proud history is infused within the design of the Queen Mary 2, a beautiful ship, purpose built for the Transatlantic voyage being stronger, sleeker, smoother and swifter than contemporary cruise ships. Cunard's guests enjoy impeccable service in refined elegance on board the world's only true ocean liner; a memorable journey that captures the spirit of a bygone era.

The classic crossing between Southampton and New York lasts seven days and nights, time for the 2,700 guests to enjoy a wonderful choice of on-board activities. Guests may start the day with a jog around the promenade deck, listen to a lecture in the planetarium, take afternoon tea in the Britannia restaurant, watch a show in the Royal Court Theatre, dance until the early hours, then stargaze under a crystal clear mid-Atlantic sky. Or they may simply enjoy the tranquillity of the voyage with a book from the library and conversation over a drink in the Chart Room lounge bar.

Queen Mary 2 operates across the North Atlantic throughout the summer, before moving to the Caribbean. On January 10th, she returns to Southampton to embark on a sensational 100-day world voyage through the Suez Canal to Asia and Australia, returning across the Indian Ocean and around the Cape of Good Hope. The transatlantic voyage costs from £1,100, the world cruise starts from £10,000 per person.



Celebrity Edge

When Celebrity conceived their latest ship, they threw away the rulebook of cruise ship design and adopted the latest trends and innovations of the hotel industry. London designer Kelly Hoppen modelled the rooms and suites, acclaimed architect Tom Wright designed the public spaces, creating Edge; a chic contemporary floating hotel dubbed "the coolest cruise ship at sea".

Edge features no fewer than 29 restaurants, bars and lounges. At the centre is the Grand Plaza, a three story atrium with a martini bar, cafés and speciality restaurants. At the stern is a Eden a three level lounge and restaurant filled with plants featuring a huge glass wall overlooking the ocean. On the top deck there's a solarium, a large outdoor pool and a landscaped garden. The most striking feature is the Magic Carpet, a cantilevered platform off the starboard side of the ship used as a boarding station for launches, which can then be raised up 13 decks and transformed into a casual bar or al fresco restaurant.

Celebrity Edge accommodates up to 2,900 passengers. She made her maiden voyage in December 2018 and her UK debut was timed to coincide with the CLIA conference in Southampton. Edge will spend this summer in the Mediterranean and the winter in the Caribbean. Next year a new sister ship called Apex will operate a series of cruises out of Southampton. A seven night Mediterranean cruise starts from £1,200 per person, in a two berth stateroom.



Seabourn Ovation

Seabourn describe their product as a "resort at sea", delivering intuitive personal service on intimate ships with a private club atmosphere. The five ships in the fleet accommodate no more than 600 guests in luxurious ocean-front suites. Each ship has a variety of casual yet elegant dining venues, all of which are complimentary, and guests may dine when, where and with whom they choose.

Ovation was launched in May 2018 and is beautifully furnished with contemporary artwork and stunning glass sculptures. Seabourn Square, a casual meeting space with coffee bar, library, business centre and concierge services, is the focus of activity in the

morning as guests plan their day. The swimming pool is mid-ships, there's a smaller plunge pool at the stern, a spa and wellness centre, and my favourite feature: a hot tub at the bow. With five restaurants, seven bars, plus a small auditorium for musical performances, a feeling of space and exclusivity permeates through the ship.

Seabourn offer intriguing voyages to 464 destinations across all seven continents. Their smaller ships can visit hidden harbours out of reach to larger cruise ships. Ovation will remain in Europe through the summer, then transit the Suez Canal to spend the winter cruising the South China Sea. Prices vary by voyage, starting from around £2,800 per person for a seven night cruise.

