

# Cruise Ships 2020

## The Year in Review

*By Shawn J. Dake*

The Cruise Lines International Association had projected that the year 2020 would see 32 million passengers take to the seas. That was before the widespread panic over the coronavirus pandemic sent bookings and stocks tumbling. While news reports first targeted specific ships mainly based in Asia, worldwide new reservations just stopped. The major companies suspended all Chinese sailings beginning on or after January 25. All cruise lines were affected whether they were sailing in heavily infected areas or not. On March 8, 2020, the U.S. State Department delivered the near-fatal blow advising American citizens not to travel by cruise ship. Three days later, the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus a worldwide pandemic. At the same time, the largest number of new cruise ships were making their debuts, creating a glut of cabins. Compounding matters, numerous ports throughout the world either banned cruise ships outright or placed severe restrictions on them. Vessels around the world weren't allowed to dock, some sailing for many weeks with nowhere to go. Beginning with Princess Cruises and then the entire Viking Cruises operation, the dominoes began to fall until virtually the entire world's cruise fleets were idled by a virus that just wouldn't let up.

The ensuing health and economic disasters were unprecedented, putting even the largest of cruise operators on the brink. Between February and May of 2020, all passenger shipping on the planet came to a halt. By August, the three largest cruise groups, Carnival Corporation, Royal Caribbean Group and Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings, were losing over \$1 billion per month. Revenue losses for the entire cruise industry for the year were estimated to be \$24 billion. Storms, wrecks and natural disasters never brought the cruise industry to its knees like COVID-19 was able to. Some cruise lines failed. Perfectly viable ships went to the scrapyards. Dates for restarting operations were pushed further and further back. If, and when, any recovery takes place, it will be a different world at sea.

As is customary, the annual “Cruise Ships 2020: The Year in Review” mentions the largest cruise lines and their numerous subsidiary lines first, followed by the smaller, independent cruise lines, listed in roughly descending order of size. At the conclusion, we pay tribute to those ships that will sail no more, reaching their ends at the scrapyards of the world or languishing unwanted far from the waters where they had recently cruised with loads of happy passengers. Let us begin our review of a difficult year.



■ *Carnival Panorama leaving Long Beach, California, on a beautiful winter's day, February 1, 2020, on one of the few voyages the ship was able to make at the start of its career. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*

## **Carnival Corporation & plc**

Carnival had faced some challenging conditions in 2019 but still managed to turn a \$3-billion profit. In 2020 the situation would be much different. In the second quarter of 2020, the company reported a \$4.4-billion loss. Carnival is a Panamanian company and therefore not eligible for funds from the federal government's coronavirus stimulus bill. By April, company stocks had fallen by 79 percent, settling at \$11.85 per share. By December they had risen to just over \$20.37 per share, with some fluctuations. In a scenario with zero revenue projections for the year, it was estimated that the company had enough liquidity to last up to 14 months. Privately, Carnival raised nearly \$6.4 billion in additional liquidity, a major portion of which came from Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, through purchasing new debt and equity positions. The Saudis now own an 8.2-percent stake, 43 million shares, in the company.

Additionally, Carnival Corporation announced draconian measures on May 14 across all of its brands, featuring a combination of layoffs, furloughs, reduced work weeks and salary reductions for employees at all levels, including senior management. In addition, by mid-June it had pledged to sell off at least six of its existing ships within 90 days, with more to follow. One month later that number had been upped to 13, eventually reaching 19 ships across the company's brands. Vessels from Costa, P&O and Carnival itself were the first to go in what's sure to be a long parade of vessels making their last voyages to the scrapyards or to other owners. For 2021, five new ships for five brands were expected to be delivered, but all except one were pushed back. In total, Carnival negotiated delays of 16 new ships in the coming years. Of particular note, Micky Arison, chairman of Carnival Corporation, sold five million shares of company stock on November 30. According to Securities and Exchange Commission filings, he still retains 80 million shares in the company founded by his father, Ted Arison.



■ *It seems hard to believe, but the Carnival Fantasy, built in 1990, was the oldest ship in the Carnival fleet at the time of its sale and was still popular. But when the pandemic put an end to cruising, the ship was beached at Aliaga on July 28, 2020. – Photo courtesy of Rich Turnwald.*

## **Carnival Cruise Lines**

Carnival Cruise Lines, as the largest subsidiary of them all, faced some of the biggest challenges. Most ships were placed in lay-up at anchorages near the ports they served. Some were forced to sail to more welcoming places in other countries. In April, when the Australian government ordered all ships to leave the country, the *Carnival Spirit* took on all the Filipino crew members from fleet mate *Carnival Splendor* and set sail for Manila, Cebu and Davao, where the crews were paid off. Getting crews home became the priority once all the passengers had been repatriated by air. In North America, the nearly new 3,954-berth *Carnival Panorama* set sail from Long Beach on April 18, bound for Asia to return Filipino and Indonesian crew members. By April, as the extent of the human and financial damage from COVID-19 became more apparent, Carnival began the sad process of withdrawing ships on a more permanent basis. The first three selected were the 2002-built *Carnival Legend*, along with the recently refurbished and renamed 101,509-gt sister ships *Carnival Sunrise* (ex *Carnival Triumph*) and *Carnival Victory*, which was in Cadiz, Spain, awaiting refurbishment under the new name *Carnival Radiance*. Built in 1999 and 2000 respectively, the former had just had \$200 million spent on updates, while the latter had its transformation postponed at least until next spring. But in the ever-changing world of coronavirus, the line reversed itself, saying that *Carnival Radiance* would

eventually replace the two Fantasy-class ships that were based in Long Beach, which Carnival sold for scrap.

Another Fantasy-class ship, *Carnival Fascination* (ex *Fascination*) would also be placed in the limbo of cold lay-up, and four of the eight ships of the class were disposed of. On December 22, *Carnival Panorama* finally made its first return to Long Beach since its spring departure, with an eye on resuming passenger service to Mexico in April 2021. In early May, 2020, 18 members of the Carnival fleet were gathered off The Bahamas. Remaining crew members, numbering approximately 10,000, transferred to nine of those vessels to begin the long journeys to their homes. The other nine ships were laid up in various anchorages, with skeleton crews. Approximately 3,000 crew remained aboard to maintain the 27 ships of the Carnival fleet. One of the more interesting transfers of crew members between vessels took place with the aid of the government of Panama. The *Carnival Miracle* disembarked crew members on the Pacific side of the Canal, who were then bussed across the Isthmus of Panama to the *Carnival Glory* waiting on the Caribbean side. Along with crew from other ships, the 110,239-gt *Carnival Glory* then sailed for Curaçao, where both commercial and charter flights were arranged to take them to their homes. As of June 15, Carnival had repatriated nearly 20,000 staff from its 27 ships, while still having more than 26,000 crew members awaiting return to over 100 countries.

By mid-summer the sad reality was that once-popular ships would be sold for scrap. The first to go was the lead ship of the eight-vessel Fantasy class, the 70,367-gt *Carnival Fantasy* (ex *Carnival Fantasy*), constructed in 1990. It was run up onto the beach at Aliaga, Turkey, on July 29, coming to rest beside the *Sovereign* (ex *Sovereign of the Seas*).



■ *Carnival Inspiration at home in the shadow of the Long Beach Cruise Terminal, viewed from the stern of the Queen Mary on February 3, 2014. Sold for scrap, it was beached on August 5, 2020, at Aliaga, Turkey. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*

Next to go was its sister, the sixth vessel of the class, the Long Beach-based *Carnival Inspiration* (ex *Inspiration*), built in 1996, which met its grinding end by ramming into the wedge along the side of its beached sister. Both ships first sailed to Curaçao, where major fittings and reusable stores were removed, then on to Turkey. In another reversal, *Carnival Imagination* (ex *Imagination*) followed in the wake of its sisters, stopping at the Caribbean island before setting course to oblivion. Predictably, *Carnival Fascination* was sold as well, coming off a cold lay-up in Cadiz, Spain, in very poor condition. It was given the new name *Century Harmony* under new Asian owners Century Harmony Cruise Limited. After a technical stop in Singapore, the 1994-built ship is supposed to become an accommodations vessel in South Korea.



■ *The huge new Mardi Gras making her inaugural trip to Rotterdam. Named for Carnival’s first ship, it sports an onboard roller coaster among other amenities. – Photo courtesy of Kees Torn, CC BY-SA 2.0.*

The largest and grandest ship ever built for Carnival, the new 5,200-passenger, nearly 184,000-gt *Mardi Gras* had its maiden Caribbean cruise postponed from November 14, 2020, to a hopeful rescheduled start on April 24, 2021. The huge ship was first floated out from its building dock at the Meyer Turku Yard on January 24, 2020. Ten days of sea trials got underway on September 28 off the coast of Finland. In the midst of the pandemic, Carnival announced that the name of a second sister ship, due in 2022, would revive the name *Carnival Celebration*. The massive LNG-powered ships will be the first of their type to operate in North America. They come on the heels of the 2019-built, near-sister ship *Costa Smeralda*, also constructed by the Meyer Turku shipyard in Finland.



■ Unlike its fleet mates in Cunard and P&O, the *Queen Elizabeth* first headed to the Philippines to repatriate crew members. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.

## Cunard Line

Cunard was in the midst of operating three World Cruises aboard each of its ships when the extent of the coronavirus pandemic became apparent. Most passengers who chose to be were flown home from the nearest major port. In the case of the *Queen Mary 2*, the majority disembarked at Fremantle, Australia. Some elected to remain aboard for the long journey back to Southampton. With stops only for fuel and provisions at Durban, the trip took more than a month. The stay was short; the *QM2* then sailed for Weymouth Bay on England’s south coast to join P&O’s *Aurora* and *Ventura*, anchored offshore. The three huge ships formed an impressive backdrop to the quaint little town. The one ship in the fleet to head in a different direction was the *Queen Elizabeth*. It was sent to the Philippines, arriving May 4 at the Manila anchorage. It finally headed toward home waters in July, arriving at Southampton on May 24.

Recognizing that passengers are going to be changing their cruise habits in the near future, Cunard Line scheduled a large number of roundtrip cruises in 2021, exclusively from New York, aboard the *Queen Mary 2*. Many potential passengers were reluctant to fly or venture far from home, and this strategy was aimed at convincing the more intrepid travelers to put to sea once again. Cunard Line cancelled all cruises through May of 2021, when all three ships normally would have been back on their world cruises.



■ *The Amsterdam was one of four Holland America Line ships sold out of the fleet in 2020. It's seen here off Sitka, Alaska, on August 12, 2010. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*

## **Holland America Line**

Holland America had its own setbacks in trying to return passengers and crews to friendly ports. Most notably, the *Zaandam* wasn't allowed to dock at a number of South American ports after beginning a segment of a cruise in the region in early March. There had been four deaths aboard from unknown causes and several people onboard were infected with coronavirus. The ship was held off Panama for days while it was debated if a transit through the canal would be allowed. Near-sister *Rotterdam* was brought in to take off passengers that were not suffering from symptoms. Both ships eventually were allowed through the Panama Canal, but more troubles waited off the coast of Florida, where the governor repeatedly said he would deny them entry, despite the cruise business being a large part of the state's economy, and ignoring the fact that allowing them to dock was the humanitarian thing to do. After their prolonged ordeal, passengers were flown home on chartered flights that were part of the agreement to allow them entry. The two ships ended up anchoring off the company-operated Bahamas out-island to begin their extended lay-ups at sea. In other areas, Holland America Line reactivated some ships to ferry its crews home. The 1,260-berth *Veendam*, 1,432-berth *Volendam* and 2,106-berth *Nieuw Amsterdam* were sent to Asia to repatriate Holland America crew from the Philippines, Indonesia, India and South Africa.



Back at the home office in Seattle, parent company Carnival Corporation’s budget-tightening measures resulted in layoffs, furloughs, reduced work weeks and salary reductions. This included Holland America Line president Orlando Ashford, who stepped down at the end of May after more than five years leading the company. Stein Kruse will continue to run the companies in the Holland America Group out of Seattle. The global pause in operations cost the line its entire, highly profitable, Alaska season of cruises and cruise tours, including hotels and rail operations, as well the summer season in Europe, fall sailings to Canada and New England, bordered by sailings in the Caribbean and at least one long, Grand Africa Voyage of 79 days, scheduled to depart in October.

On July 15, Holland America Line announced the shocking purge of four ships from its fleet. It shouldn’t have been surprising since they were the oldest remaining members, but two of them were billed as co-flagships and operated the line’s prestige services on World Cruises and Grand Voyages. The sisters *Maasdam* (1993) and *Veendam* (1996), originally part of a quartet, were sold to Greek operator Seajets and renamed *Aegean Myth* and *Aegean Majesty*, respectively. The *Rotterdam* (1997) and *Amsterdam* (2000) should see further service – they were sold to Fred. Olsen and are set to join its fleet when service resumes. The departures come as sad news to longtime Holland America fans. Historically, it marks the first time since 1872 that a ship named *Rotterdam* has not continuously been a member of the line. That vacancy will be short-lived, however. On July 30, Holland America announced that the name of one of its new ships currently under construction at the Fincantieri Marghera yard in Italy will be changed from *Ryndam* to *Rotterdam*. The seventh ship to bear the name will be delivered one year to the day later. The new *Rotterdam* will be the only vessel delivered to Carnival Corporation from its builders in the entire year 2021. Entry into service has been pushed back to November.



■ In February 2020, the Japan-based *Diamond Princess* was among the earliest ships to have confirmed cases of COVID-19 aboard. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.

## Princess Cruises

Princess Cruises was the cruise line to receive the most unwanted publicity –the Japan-based *Diamond Princess* was one of the early centers of the coronavirus outbreak. More than 700 people aboard tested positive, and six died. Passengers were quarantined on board, and when they were eventually flown home they were quarantined again for a two-week period at U.S. military bases. Princess Cruises was hit again when the San Francisco-based *Grand Princess* was denied docking in March after a passenger from the previous cruise died of coronavirus. On the next cruise, two passengers and 19 crew members tested positive. The ship was forced to circle offshore for days before being allowed to dock in Oakland, away from the main cruise terminal. It was later moved to Los Angeles, and then went to sea. Ultimately, 115 people from the ship tested positive.

On March 12, 2020, Princess Cruises, for the first time in its 55-year history, announced “a voluntary and temporary pause of global operations” for 60 days. As the severity of the pandemic revealed itself, this arbitrary deadline would be repeatedly extended. The *Sapphire Princess* and *Majestic Princess* were among the first to be removed from service and laid up. The former was scheduled to resume cruises from Australia in May; the date kept being pushed back and ultimately proved infeasible. Also in Australia, *Ruby Princess* was allowed to dock at

an industrial pier in Port Kembla, New South Wales, reportedly with 1,000 crew members still aboard with 140 cases of confirmed coronavirus. Earlier, 2,650 passengers had disembarked at Sydney and dispersed ashore without testing. Later 900 of them tested positive and 28 died, although numbers were constantly changing. Both New South Wales and, later, the Australian government banned all cruise ships from Australian ports, and the remaining Princess ships were forced to depart. Eventually the entire fleet of 18 ships found itself docked or anchored at ports throughout the world as the service suspension was implemented. One of the last to tie up was the smallest ship, the 670-passenger *Pacific Princess* (ex *R Three*), which was on a 111-day world cruise that left from Los Angeles on January 20. After being banned from stops at Bali, Singapore and Phuket, Thailand, passengers weren't allowed to land when the ship stopped in Sri Lanka, despite no reports of coronavirus on board. After refueling, two days later the ship turned south, sailing for 18 more days. Eventually the cruise would terminate in Fremantle/Perth, Australia, where most guests were flown home. Those that chose to remain aboard sailed directly on to Los Angeles, where the ship finally docked on April 20. In Alaska, the entire season was cancelled, and all the land-based lodges, train and motor coach services were shut down.

As with other cruise lines, the projected date to return ships to service became a moving target. The decision was to bring vessels back on a rolling basis with some coming online much sooner than others. The ongoing health crisis, plus governmental restrictions by Canada, the United States, Great Britain and others, quickly put the kibosh on that. By August, the writing was on the wall that the shutdown would continue well into the future. At that time both the 2021 World Cruise on the *Island Princess* and a long Circle South America Cruise departing out of Australia aboard the *Pacific Princess* were cancelled. Not only had the booking window become too short, but it was obvious that port restrictions around the world wouldn't allow the ships to dock in most countries. Combined with lingering upticks in coronavirus cases and the uncertainty of air travel, there was no choice but to cancel the signature voyages.

For 2022, the *Coral Princess* will handle the World Voyage for the first time. That ship was the last Carnival vessel to bring passengers to an East Coast port when it arrived in Miami from South America on April 4. The ship carried over 1,000 passengers, who had been self-isolating in their cabins, including 12 guests with confirmed cases of COVID-19 and three deaths reported.

On a much happier, pre-pandemic, note, Princess Cruises set a world record for the most renewal-of-vows ceremonies, performed at multiple locations, aboard three of its ships. On February 11, 2020, 1,443 couples on the *Crown Princess*, *Regal Princess* and *Royal Princess* reaffirmed their love for one another by saying “I Do” again.

And during the pandemic, on July 9, 2020, the new *Enchanted Princess* completed its sea trials off Italy. It then returned to the Fincantieri shipyard for further outfitting. In the midst of the pandemic, with almost no cruise ships at sea, the *Enchanted Princess* joined the Princess Cruises fleet on September 30, 2020, in a handover ceremony at the Fincantieri shipyard in Monfalcone, Italy. The ship was the 100th vessel built by that yard. It remains to be seen when the fifth unit of the 3,660-passenger Royal Princess class will welcome its first passenger aboard, although it remained on schedule to arrive in North America in December 2020 ahead of a season of planned Caribbean cruises.

The final member of the 143,714-gt sisters, the *Discovery Princess*, had been scheduled for delivery in 2022, but it will no doubt be delayed. In line with the new U.S. CDC “Framework

for Conditional Sailing Order” guidelines issued in November, Princess Cruises extended its “pause in global operations,” affecting all voyages through March 31, 2021, and all future cruises longer than seven days sailing in and out of U.S. ports through November 1, 2021.

Four Princess ships have sailed their last voyages with the line and will be transferred out of the fleet for new roles. The 108,977-gt sister ships *Golden Princess* and *Star Princess* will be moving to P&O Cruises Australia. All future cruises of the two ships were cancelled in a bittersweet announcement issued October 22, 2020. They will be replacing two other sister ships, only a few years older but of a smaller class. The 1995-built *Sun Princess* and 1998-built *Sea Princess* (ex *Sea Princess*, *Adonia*) were sold by Carnival Corporation in September. The two 77,441-gt ships have been based in Australia for a number of years and were the last two members of a quartet that still remained in Princess Cruises colors. The *Sun Princess* went to Japan’s NGO Peace Boat and will be renamed *Pacific World*. The *Sea Princess* was sold to new Chinese owners, Sanya International Cruise Development Co., Ltd., which has given it the name of *Charming*. That original 60-day “temporary pause” was extended to May 14, 2021, at press time.



■ *P&O's new Iona, the largest ship in company history, has been delivered by the Meyer Werft yard in Germany. The 185,000-gt, LNG-powered ship has yet to see its first passenger. – Photo courtesy of Kees Torn, CC BY-SA 2.0.*

## **P&O Cruises**

P&O was informed by the Meyer Werft Shipyard that all work was suspended on its nearly complete, 185,000-gt *Iona*, with the ship remaining docked at Bremerhaven, Germany. Work on the interior of the ship was temporarily suspended and sea trials were postponed. The new ship went directly into lay-up from the shipyard with all inaugural festivities postponed. In June, the ship was moved to Rotterdam for final outfitting before returning to lay-up to await the restart of P&O operations whenever the British cruise industry would be allowed to resume operations. After undergoing a successful series of sea trials, the *Iona* was finally handed over to P&O on October 9, 2020. The *Iona* is the first of two ships of a new class for P&O. The LNG-powered ship is one of several vessels based on a platform shared by Costa Crociere, AIDA Cruises, P&O and Carnival Cruise Line. It was built at a cost of \$950 million. The various ships are being built at Meyer's shipyards in Papenburg, Germany, and Turku, Finland. *Iona* is the 50th cruise ship to be built by Meyer Werft. It comes 20 years after the same yard delivered the *Aurora*.



■ *The Oceana of P&O was the first of six cruise ships purchased by SeaJets, which renamed it Queen of the Oceans. – Photo courtesy of Pjotr Mahhonin, CC BY-SA 4.0.*

One of the oldest ships in the P&O fleet, the 77,499-gt, 2000-built *Oceana* (ex *Ocean Princess*) was placed in cold lay-up on the River Tyne, indicating that it would not be returning to service quickly, or at all. The latter scenario was confirmed with the news that the ship had been sold in June 2020, becoming one of the first official vessel victims of the coronavirus pandemic. Although originally built for Princess Cruises as the fourth ship of a quartet, it has been with P&O for nearly its entire career. The buyer turned out to be SeaJets, a Greek ferry operator that renamed it *Queen of the Oceans*.



■ Pacific Explorer led a convoy of its former Princess Cruises fleet mates going from Australia to Asia. – Photo courtesy of P&O Australia.

## **P&O Cruises Australia**

P&O Cruises Australia ships were ordered to leave Australian ports, along with all other foreign cruise ships. With few options, they decided to sail the ships in convoy to Indonesia and the Philippines to repatriate the crew members aboard. The *Pacific Explorer* (ex *Dawn Princess*) left first at a slow speed to wait for its sister ships *Sun Princess* and *Sea Princess* (ex *Sea Princess*, *Adonia*). They were joined by *Pacific Dawn* (ex *Regal Princess*) and *Pacific Aria* (ex *Ryndam*) to complete the group of ships headed to Asia. The latter two had previously been sold to Cruise & Maritime Voyages with delivery expected later in the year, but that fell through with the pandemic and subsequent default of that company. When cruising is allowed to resume, P&O Cruises Australia will be the beneficiary of two more redundant Princess ships. At an undetermined future date, the *Golden Princess* and *Star Princess* will join Carnival Corporation’s Australian fleet.

## **Seabourn Cruise Line**

Seabourn used its 450-berth *Seabourn Quest* to return crew members who were stranded aboard that vessel and its sister ship *Seabourn Odyssey* to Europe. In a move undoubtedly influenced by the pandemic shutdown, 35-year industry veteran Rick Meadows stepped down as president of Seabourn. During his tenure, the cruise line grew from an operation with three lovely, but aging, small 212-passenger yachts to one with five modern luxury cruise ships. He led Seabourn since 2011, and was also in charge of North American operations for Cunard Line for two years. On May 14, Carnival Corp. announced cost-cutting measures, reducing staff across their brands, including senior management. Richard Meadows was one of the truly nice gentlemen in the

cruise business and he will be greatly missed. His replacement is Josh Leibowitz, a Carnival Corporation executive.

Idled at the start of the pandemic, by September the entire 2020 schedule of cruises for Seabourn had been cancelled. The 2021 World Cruise of the *Seabourn Sojourn* was also cancelled. The line didn't have any cruises scheduled until May 25, 2021, which was a more realistic timeline than most companies had scheduled for their ships in the rush to resume cruising. The company has plans to expand in the future, with two new 23,000-gt, 264-passenger expedition ships on the way from the T. Mariotti yard in Genoa, Italy. The *Seabourn Venture* will be first, and is still on track to launch in 2022. On September 18 the first steel was cut for the unnamed second ship, which will arrive a year later.





■ *The 17-year-old Costa Mediterranea was one of four ships disposed of by the line in a purge of its oldest tonnage. It's seen here in better days arriving at Antigua on April 16, 2004. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*

## **Costa Crociere S.p.A.**

Costa Crociere made history by being the last major company to have a ship at sea during the COVID-19 outbreak. The 92,720-gt *Costa Deliziosa*, with 1,519 passengers remaining aboard, was docked in Genoa, Italy, on April 22, 2020. Two days earlier, the ship called at Barcelona, where Spanish, Portuguese and French passengers were allowed to disembark. There were also 898 crew members aboard. There were no cases of coronavirus on the ship.

The *Costa Deliziosa* had departed from Venice on its annual world cruise on January 5, 2020. The ship was in the midst of its 113-day voyage when the World Health Organization declared coronavirus a global pandemic on March 11. As nations closed their borders and ports turned cruise ships away, Costa made the decision to sail with passengers back to Europe. The last time they were allowed ashore was March 14, during a call in Australia. The world voyage was originally scheduled to end in Venice on April 26. For more than a month, on the last legs of this trip, the ship only made technical stops to refuel and take on provisions, with no one allowed off. The 92,720-gt *Costa Deliziosa* also had the distinction of being the first Costa ship to attempt a restart of operations, with a seven-night cruise departing from Trieste on September 6, visiting all Italian ports. The itineraries were later expanded to include Greece, but the cruises were forced to shut down during November and December as a result of restrictions enacted by the Greek government due to a rising number of coronavirus cases.

A second ship, the 133,019-gt *Costa Diadema*, set sail on September 19, offering seven-night itineraries from Genoa to the Italian ports of Civitavecchia for Rome, Naples, Palermo, Cagliari and La Spezia. As more ships reentered service, the next in line was the flagship *Costa Smeralda* in October, followed by the *Costa Firenze*, the brand new 135,500-gt ship under

construction at the Marghera yard of Fincantieri. Only citizens of Italy were allowed to cruise on these trips. Four ships would have been in service by the end of 2020 if not for Italy’s no-sail order for holiday cruises. The ships were set to begin voyages again on January 7, 2021.

Not all ships would be resuming service. The incredible *Costa Victoria* unfortunately has the dubious distinction of being one of the first Carnival ships to be sold, probably for scrap, although dismantling has not commenced. The announcement came in early July, after the ship relocated from Civitavecchia to the small Italian town of Piombino, where the 1996-built, 75,166-gt vessel was decommissioned. The *Costa Victoria* was the last ship completed for Costa Cruises while the line remained a family-owned enterprise, and it featured sleek, modern Italian design elements. In some ways it can be regarded as one of the last in a long line of classic Italian ships, although it was built by the Bremer Vulkan yards in Germany. Costa said its ownership was transferred to Genova Trasporti Marittimi, a subsidiary of the San Giorgio del Porto shipyard. Also sold was the 1993-built *Costa Neoromantica* (ex *Costa Romantica*), although that ship will see future service with Celestyal Cruises. The 85,861-gt *Costa Atlantica*, built in 2000, has been sold to China State Shipbuilding Corporation for Carnival’s planned joint venture operation. The slightly newer sister ship *Costa Mediterranea*, completed in 2003, will be joining her. Both ships carry 2,114 passengers.

In happier, pre-pandemic times, on February 22, 2020, Costa christened its largest ship to date. Actress Penelope Cruz served as godmother to the 183,900-gt *Costa Smeralda* at a lavish ceremony held in the port of Savona, Italy. With a maximum capacity of 6,600 passengers (5,200 double) the mega-ship had first entered service two months earlier on December 21, 2019, after being completed by the Meyer Werft Shipyard at Turku, Finland.



■ *AIDAprera made several attempts to restart cruising only to be shut down by a computer hack in December. – Photo courtesy of Philippe Ales, CC BY-SA 4.0.*

## **AIDA Cruises**

AIDA was the first division within the Carnival Corporation to schedule a return to cruising with its very large ships. With Germany having a more modest number of deaths and infections, it was the logical place to begin cruises. Like so many other plans in these uncertain times, it didn't happen. On August 5, the 125,600-gt *AIDAprera* was supposed to resume sailing from Hamburg for the first time since the pandemic shut down operations. Despite intensive preparations, the company didn't receive permission from the flag state of Italy for the *AIDAprera* and the smaller 71,100-gt *AIDamar* to commence sailing that August. Although most European ports remained closed until the end of September, AIDA rescheduled for September 6 from Kiel. Hamburg also remained open. On December 5, *AIDAprera* got underway on its first sailing since March. The ship normally carries 3,250 passengers but only had 800 aboard for the seven-day cruise among the Canary Islands.

The largest ship in the AIDA fleet is the 183,900-gt *AIDAnova*. The next 5,200-passenger ship in that three-ship series is *AIDAcosma*. It was due to be delivered in 2021, but between the pandemic and related shipyard problems, it was delayed. Both of these ships were built by Meyer Werft, in Papenburg, Germany, and are among the first large passenger vessels to be LNG-powered. AIDA Cruises ended the year by cancelling the New Year's cruises of the *AIDAprera* and *AIDamar* due to a major cybersecurity breach at their headquarters in Rostock and aboard the ships. Among the issues, the boarding pass system wasn't working, and a hacker attack on their servers was suspected. The cruises were set to resume right after the new year began, but tighter German travel restrictions forced AIDA to shut down once again until at least March 2021. It was a year of stops and starts, with the resumption of anything resembling normal operations a moving target.

## **Royal Caribbean Group** (formerly Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd)

Royal Caribbean Group is the parent company of Royal Caribbean International, Celebrity Cruises, Azamara Cruises and Silversea Cruises and is affiliated with other European-based cruise lines. It's the second largest cruise group in the world. In 2020, with 100 percent of its fleets shut down, that big size translated to big problems. By mid-April, Royal Caribbean had furloughed 26 percent of its workforce in the United States. Shares of its stock had fallen by 75 percent. Analysts predicted that the company could last 11 or 12 months without a revenue stream. The heavy debt load from its massive building program only added to its problems. The group had the same issues as other companies, with ships being turned away from ports and the subsequent costs for repatriation of passengers and crews. By July, as the depths of the pandemic became apparent, the company shed itself of the Pullmantur Cruises division and its corporate-owned ships but acquired full ownership of Silversea Cruises. With the word “cruises” being less than popular thanks to a close association with the pandemic, the company officially changed its name from Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd to Royal Caribbean Group in July 2020.

One other sad note: cruise industry pioneer Arne Wilhelmsen passed away on April 11 at the age of 90. He was one of the founders of Royal Caribbean Cruise Line in 1968, initially made up of a trio of Norwegian shipping companies – Anders Wilhelmsen, IM Skaugen and Gotaas-Larsen. While the latter two later dropped out of the partnership, Anders Wilhelmsen remained active in the company. Arne Wilhelmsen was RCCL's largest single shareholder and one of the wealthiest men in Norway.



■ *The world's largest cruise ship, Wonder of the Seas, was launched September 5, 2020. Shown here alongside a rendering of how it will appear when completed. – Photo courtesy of Royal Caribbean International.*

## **Royal Caribbean International**

Royal Caribbean International fared better than most in managing to stay out of the news and get its passengers home safely. With the ships otherwise idle, it was time deal with the massive numbers of crewmembers dispersed throughout the fleet. Royal Caribbean was among the first to decide to use the vessels themselves for this purpose rather than incur the enormous cost of airfare, even when flights could be found. With cruises in Asia among the early cancellations,

and ships unceremoniously kicked out of Australia, the company used the 4,180-passenger *Spectrum of the Seas* to take on the crew from the 2,146-berth *Radiance of the Seas* and then sail to Bali, Manila and Shanghai, where crew signed off and headed for home.

In a similar move, service staff members from the 2,852-berth *Celebrity Solstice* were moved to two separate Royal Caribbean ships for passage to their home countries. The *Voyager of the Seas* took the Filipino crew to Manila, while the *Ovation of the Seas* carried the Indonesian contingent on a voyage to Bali. Of particular note, *Quantum of the Seas* became the first international cruise ship to return to a Chinese port in late April. After spending 66 days at sea, the ship docked in Shanghai, returning 353 crew members home. In one of the more absurd scenarios, Canadian crew members stranded on ships in Miami had to sail to England before flying home to Canada instead of making a 20-minute transit to the local airport. *Freedom of the Seas*, *Empress of the Seas* (ex *Nordic Empress*, *Empress of the Seas*, *Empress*) and *Majesty of the Seas* all sailed from Miami on May 15, transporting European, Canadian and other nationalities to Southampton, where they could finally return home by air.

Sending the crews home was a high priority for all cruise lines that recognized the depth and longevity of this cruise shipping shutdown. The sad reality is that these thousands upon thousands of crew members are now unemployed, and many will permanently remain in that situation since not all ships will come back.

*Majesty of the Seas* was ultimately the sole survivor of the trio of 74,077-gt cruise ships that forever changed the face of cruising (see also Pullmantur Cruceros). Its last days under Royal Caribbean’s Crown & Anchor house flag came in December, when it was sold along with its smaller fleet mate *Empress of the Seas*.

Besides the challenges of staffing and corporate cutbacks, new construction projects and major fleet refurbishments were often postponed. One that did get underway, albeit two months late, was the scheduled “Royal Amplification” refit of the 225,282-gt *Allure of the Seas*. That started in May, but the scope of work was limited to technical and navigational upgrades only, lasting about 30 days. The newbuild *Odyssey of the Seas* had its delivery pushed back by at least six months into 2021. The 1,141-ft, 168,666-gt, 4,180-passenger ship emerged from its enormous building hall #6 at Meyer Werft in Papenburg, Germany, on November 28, looking rather spectacular in an all-blue exterior. And finally, the largest passenger ship in the world, *Wonder of the Seas*, was launched on September 5 but has had its delivery pushed back into 2022. Royal Caribbean cites work stoppages at the St. Nazaire, France, shipyard, Chantiers de l’Atlantique for the 10-month delay, but mostly it’s another new cruise ship with nowhere to go. The ship was supposed to have begun inaugural cruises in China in 2021.

Some of the superlatives of this enormous vessel include a gross tonnage of 228,082 tons, a length of 1,188 feet and the ability to carry 5,518 passengers based on double occupancy. At maximum capacity this ship can carry 6,680 passengers plus 2,200 officers and crew for a total complement of 8,880 souls. Maybe not the best statistics to advertise in the post-coronavirus era. This fifth Oasis-class ship isn’t identical to its sisters. It differs in the configuration of the uppermost decks midship and in the funnel arrangement.

Royal Caribbean’s first attempt to resume revenue voyages was with *Quantum of the Seas* based out of Singapore. The short cruises to nowhere began on December 3 at reduced capacity. But one positive test result caused the cruise to be shortened, and the December 10 voyage was cancelled. Despite this, most passengers viewed their cruise as a positive experience.



■ *The new Celebrity Apex as seen from its sister Celebrity Edge in October 2020 in its “At Sea” inauguration in October 2020, joining other Celebrity ships idle in the Bahamas. – Photo courtesy of Celebrity Cruises.*

## Celebrity Cruises

Celebrity became the first cruise line to have an all-female team of bridge officers in command of a large cruise ship. Led by Kate McCue, the first American female cruise ship captain, its team of 26 women representing 16 countries took the *Celebrity Edge* out to sea to celebrate International Women’s Day in March. Celebrity has grown the number of women officers on their bridge teams from 3 percent to nearly 25 percent over the last few years.

The 130,818-gt *Celebrity Edge* made its debut in 2018. It was followed by its freshly completed sister *Celebrity Apex* in March 2020. The gala christening ceremony, scheduled for Southampton, was delayed due to rising coronavirus concerns. President and CEO Lisa Lutloff-Perlo said in part, “We believe that continuing with the naming ceremony in the current environment would be inconsistent with the spirit and intention of such an important and meaningful event. We have therefore made the difficult decision to postpone our formal naming ceremony until later this year and will name *Celebrity Apex* when it arrives in Fort Lauderdale to begin its Caribbean season.” That didn’t happen either.

Three additional, but larger, near-sister ships of 140,600 gt and enlarged to 1,073 feet in length were ordered, with the *Celebrity Beyond* now delayed until 2022 and the others pushed back to 2023 and 2024, all being built by the French Chantiers de l’Atlantique shipyard. The traditional coin ceremony coincided with the keel block laying for the *Celebrity Beyond*, held on November 19, 2020. Prior to the pandemic outbreak, the 122,400-gt *Celebrity Silhouette* was

given a massive stem to stern refurbishment. The 2011-built vessel stayed in the shipyard for 42 days being modernized to meet the standards of the newest ships. The refurbishment program, dubbed “Celebrity Revolution,” was a \$500-million initiative intended to provide fleet-wide upgrades to all the veteran ships. *Celebrity Silhouette* was the fourth and latest, with all subsequent work being postponed or cancelled. Celebrity Cruises’ first newly built ship, the *Horizon* of 1990, has been sold for scrap. It had most recently sailed for Pullmantur Cruises.

## **Azamara Cruises**

Azamara lost its longtime president and CEO Larry Pimentel, who resigned on April 15 amid the cutbacks and restructuring throughout the greater Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd organization. His background included 28 years’ experience in executive positions within the cruise industry, the last 10 as head of Azamara. The entire three-ship fleet of identical 30,277-gt ships headed to Glasgow, Scotland, at the end of June, with the last arriving on July 1. They will remain laid up on the River Clyde until the coronavirus pandemic subsides. As a reminder of these comfortable former “R-Ships,” this is their fleet list: *Azamara Journey* (ex *R Six*, *Blue Dream*, *Celebrity Journey*), *Azamara Quest* (ex *R Seven*, *Delphin Renaissance*, *Blue Moon*), and *Azamara Pursuit* (ex *R Eight*, *Minerva II*, *Royal Princess*, *Adonia*). All were built at Chantiers de l’Atlantique, St. Nazaire, France, the first two in 2000 and the last one in 2001.



■ *The new Silver Origin, designed especially for cruising the Galapagos Islands, is seen on sea trials in May 2020. It's in Ecuador awaiting its first passengers. – Photo courtesy of Silversea Cruises.*

## Silversea Cruises

Silversea provided a ray of hope in an otherwise very dark year. With ships out of service amid the pandemic, the line took delivery on June 3, 2020, of its newest ship, the *Silver Origin*. Although originally conceived as a sister to the *Celebrity Flora*, delivered last year by the De Hoop Shipyard in Lobith, Netherlands, the new 5,739-gt, 100-passenger vessel was switched to Silversea Cruises following that company's purchase by parent company Royal Caribbean. The minimalist interiors are extremely attractive, and the service onboard should be superb, with butler service available for every room. Accommodations are all suites, each with a private balcony.

This is the first newly built expedition ship in the history of Silversea Cruises. The entire executive staff of the line flew to Rotterdam for the in-person transfer of ownership from the shipyard. Silversea CEO Roberto Martinoli stated what everyone was feeling when he said, “This day has been significant under many aspects; to start it is a testament of how the world is slowly opening up from the lockdown we have all been forced into. Also, this delivery is proof that we all have the power to overcome almost anything: the fact that this small yard in the Netherlands managed to complete our ship under incredible circumstances is proof of human resilience and ingenuity, as well as European craftsmanship, characteristics which are at the soul of our company.” While other ships remained idle, *Silver Origin* proceeded on the long voyage



to Ecuador. Once passengers can join it, the ship will take up station in the Galapagos Islands, where it will cruise year-round.

In July, Royal Caribbean purchased the remaining shares in Silversea Cruises to gain full ownership; it previously had held a two-thirds interest. Manfredi Lefebvre d’Ovidio, who took over the company from his late father, will serve as chairman of Silversea. Roberto Martinoli will remain the brand’s president and CEO. Thus ends the family ownership of one of the last passenger shipping dynasties.

Work resumed on the new *Silver Moon*, and the ship successfully conducted its sea trials in August. It’s a sister ship of the 40,700-gt *Silver Muse*, which was completed in 2017. Both of the 596-passenger luxury ships were constructed by Fincantieri, the *Silver Muse* at Sestri Ponente in Genoa and *Silver Moon* at Ancona. Finishing work continued onboard ahead of the official delivery date of October 30, when the ship was handed over to Silversea in a low-key, intimate ceremony at the shipyard.



■ *In a raft of vessels at Elefsis, Greece, are three ships once very popular in North America. From left, the Marella Celebration (the former Noordam) is nestled next to the Horizon, while on the far right is the Marella Dream (ex Homeric, the last ship of Home Lines, which later became the Westerdam). – Photo courtesy of Captain Apostolos Kaknis.*

## **Marella Cruises**

Marella’s oldest ship, the 1984-built *Marella Celebration* (ex *Noordam*, *Thomson Celebration*), became the first casualty of the COVID-19 pandemic aftermath. The 1,200-passenger ship, originally built for the Holland America Line, has been permanently retired. Its on-and-off fleet mate, the 1,506-passenger *Marella Dream* (ex *Homeric*, *Westerdam*, *Costa Europa*, *Thomson Dream*) has also been retired by Marella Cruises. It was built in 1986 as the final ship of the venerable Home Lines. It went to Holland America Line, when that company purchased the assets of Home Lines, sailing as the *Westerdam*. Shortly afterwards the ship was stretched, growing to 54,763 gt and a length of 798 feet. In any guise, it was arguably one of the best ships built in the 1980s. In 2010, it was chartered for 10 years to Thomson Cruises, the predecessor of Marella, with an option to buy. In today’s climate that didn’t happen, and like so many other fine ships, its future is uncertain. When Marella does resume some semblance of service, its ship of preference would be the *Marella Explorer* (ex *Galaxy*, *Celebrity Galaxy*, *Mein Schiff*, *Mein Schiff I*), originally built in 1996 for Celebrity Cruises.



■ *The failure of Pullmantur spelled the end for the Sovereign, seen here docked at Livorno, Italy, in 2015. Built in 1988 for Royal Caribbean, it ushered in the era of new megaships to come. – Piergiuliano Chesi photo, CC BY-SA 3.0.*



■ *The end for the Monarch, formerly Royal Caribbean’s Monarch of the Seas, followed the demise of the Pullmantur Cruceros division. The first ship to be beached in late July at Aliaga, Turkey. – Photo courtesy of Roel van Deursen, CC BY-SA 2.0.*



■ *Sisters to the end, the Sovereign, (second from left) was beached one day later, but its dismantling proceeded at a much more rapid pace, as this photo dated October 28, 2020, shows. By the end of the year only a small section of its stern remained. – Photo by Veli Turayurt.*

## **Pullmantur Cruceros**

Pullmantur, which is 49-percent owned by Royal Caribbean Group, looked to be among the least likely cruise line to survive the pandemic. It didn't. It became the first cruise line to officially call it quits. The company filed for reorganization under Spanish insolvency laws. Its entire three-ship fleet, consisting of *Sovereign* (ex *Sovereign of the Seas*), *Monarch* (ex *Monarch of the Seas*) and *Horizon* (ex *Horizon*, *Island Star*, *Pacific Dream*), was initially placed in cold lay-up, indicating a long period of idleness.

The ships are between 29 and 32 years of age, and while once the largest and most popular vessels of Royal Caribbean and Celebrity Cruises, they're now reaching the end of their useful years. A fourth ship, the 1992-built, 47,413-gt *Zenith*, had already started its charter to the Japanese Peace Boat organization as 2020 began. Since the ships were still owned by the parent company, it was hoped that the two ex-Royal Caribbean ships could go back to that fleet while the 47,427-gt *Horizon* would be returned to Celebrity as a small-ship option. As time progressed into summer, both *Sovereign* and *Monarch* were stripped of their valuable fittings at Naples. On July 11, the once-proud *Monarch* departed on its last voyage, headed to the breakers at Aliaga, Turkey, arriving later that week. It was soon joined on the beach by its slightly elder sister *Sovereign*, which ultimately was wedged in the middle alongside the *Carnival Fantasy* (ex *Fantasy*) and joined days later by the *Carnival Inspiration* (ex *Inspiration*). The third of the former Royal Caribbean sisters, the 74,077-gt *Majesty of the Seas*, built in 1992, never made the transition to Pullmantur as reported in 2019. Normally carrying 2,356 passengers, its last duty was transporting idle crew members from Miami to Southampton, then remaining at an

anchorage off Portsmouth until its fate could be decided, which resulted in a sale to Indian interests. The previous ship that had been chartered to Peace Boat since 2012, the 1982-built *Ocean Dream* (ex *Tropicale*, *Costa Tropicale*, *Pacific Star*), sailed off to be scrapped at Alang, India.

Meanwhile, as part of a restructuring plan submitted to Spanish authorities, Pullmantur could possibly reemerge from bankruptcy as a smaller, two-ship operation using a pair of Millennium-class ships from Celebrity Cruises.



■ Operating at less than half-normal capacity, *Mein Schiff 2* was one of the first big ships to return to cruising with short voyages to nowhere from Germany. – Photo courtesy of *CruiseMapper.com*.

## TUI Cruises

TUI became one of the first big ship operators to attempt a return to cruising, with a three-day voyage on July 24, 2020, departing from Hamburg and stopping at no ports. For this cruise TUI used its newest vessel, the 111,500-gt *Mein Schiff 2*, which had just been introduced in January 2019. Instead of the normal 2,900-passenger capacity, the sailing was limited to 1,200 German passengers. On board, passengers and crew were required to stay five feet apart or wear protective masks, and as expected there were no longer self-service buffets. Health questionnaires and temperature checks were required prior to boarding. TUI Cruises, like others, had been shut down since March. Germany suffered less severe numbers of cases and deaths and by July was anxious to carefully reopen its economy, of which this cruise was the first step in the maritime world.

In a further expansion of the tentative return to cruising, the 99,300-gt *Mein Schiff 6* reopened the Greek Port of Piraeus on September 16 after a six-month closure. It became the first ship to resume cruising in the Eastern Mediterranean but quickly ran into trouble after a dozen crew members tested positive for COVID-19. The programs continued and, effective with the December 17 sailing in the Canary Islands, TUI swapped the larger *Mein Schiff 1* to the itinerary, with the *Mein Schiff 6* returning to Germany for engine repairs. TUI has been operating its cruises at approximately 60-percent capacity, with passengers only allowed to book outside balcony staterooms.



■ A rendering of the Hapag-Lloyd fleet from April 2020 along with a representative view of its newest-generation expedition ships showing the HANSEATIC nature introduced in 2019. –

## Hapag-Lloyd Cruises

Hapag-Lloyd brought most of its fleet back to Hamburg, Germany, after disembarking its last passengers on March 21. The two new expedition ships, the *HANSEATIC nature* and the *HANSEATIC inspiration*, were sent to Blohm+Voss shipyard for repair work. The two ultra-luxury cruise ships *Europa* and *Europa 2* were moored in different areas of the harbor. The *Europa 2* used its downtime at the Cruise Center Altona to put the cold ironing system to a long-term test. Shoreside electrical power was the only source of energy while at berth, while the main and auxiliary engines were turned off. The small luxury ship, with a capacity of 500 guests, required only 2.2 mw in port, enabling it to reduce emissions to near zero.

Elsewhere, the line wanted to return as many crew members as possible to their home countries, a difficult proposition given the suspension of flights and travel restrictions. As part of the repatriation efforts, the line performed a transatlantic “crew cruise” using the *HANSEATIC nature* to transport crew members from Barbados to Hamburg, then on to their homes. All ships had reached port by May 2. A fifth ship, the *Bremen* (ex *Frontier Spirit*) remained at an anchorage off Auckland, New Zealand. That ship was sold last year but won’t leave the fleet until May 2021, when it’s expected to be replaced by the still-building, new, 230-berth *HANSEATIC spirit*.

Hapag-Lloyd was among the earliest European companies to resume cruising. At the end of July, the *Europa 2* and the *HANSEATIC inspiration* set sail, but with their passenger capacity reduced by 40 percent, which translated to 150 to 300 guests. The ships are justifiably famous for having a 1:1 crew-to-passenger ratio, providing outstanding service. The short cruise programs began with roundtrip sailings from Hamburg, and only guests from Germany, Austria and Switzerland were allowed to board.

## Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings

Norwegian turned a profit of \$930.2 million in 2019, but saw its publicly held stock prices fall by 81 percent in April 2020. Another company that had recently undergone a huge building program, it was estimated that the company could hold on for nine or ten months without revenues. Perhaps that was the reason they were the most anxious among cruise lines to get passengers back aboard their ships. In the early stages of the pandemic shutdown, they would plan new startup dates every 30 days, with upcoming cancellations announced on about that same schedule, until it became apparent that this cessation of operations would go on for a much longer period than originally expected. Securing new financing has allowed the group, made up of three cruise lines, to keep its operation afloat while the ships remain out of service.

On November 2 it was announced that all three divisions of the holding company, Norwegian Cruise Line, Oceania Cruises and Regent Seven Seas Cruises, would finally throw in the towel on the year 2020, without resuming service, with some ships not expected to try again until after April 2021. The terse text was typical of what nearly all cruise lines were going through: “As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact communities around the globe, we have made the decision to further suspend all voyages through December 31, 2020.”



■ *The Norwegian Jewel, seen here leaving Los Angeles harbor on October 11, 2015, has spent much of its idle time inside the breakwater at Long Beach, California. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*



## Norwegian Cruise Line

Norwegian Cruise Line started the year by sending its 22-year-old *Norwegian Spirit* (ex *Superstar Leo*) into drydock for a 40-day refurbishment costing in excess of \$100 million. Work started on the 75,338-gt ship on January 2, 2020, in Marseille, France. It will include new dining venues, a refurbished spa and of course additional staterooms. While this is quite a lot to expend on the oldest and smallest member of the current fleet, it’s expected that the *Norwegian Spirit* will be the company’s ship of choice to sail the more exotic itineraries throughout the world and in particular the Far East.

As with all the world’s cruise fleet, Norwegian was forced to completely shut down operations in March. Almost weekly it continued to provide overly optimistic dates for a return to service. As the extent of the problem became clearer, the 1,936-passenger *Norwegian Sun* was the first to have its return to service date pushed back to October 18, 2020. Of the major cruise lines, NCL was in the most precarious position to withstand an entire year without revenue. Combating questions concerning the company’s long-term viability, on May 6, 2020, NCL president & CEO Harry Sommer issued the following statement: “Let me start out by addressing the elephant in the room – Norwegian Cruise Line as a company is doing very well! I am pleased to report that our company raised an additional \$2.2 billion of liquidity yesterday – yes, \$2.2 billion – which means that we now have \$3.5 billion in total liquidity. This puts us in the best position of any of the public cruise operators to weather the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our company will remain in a strong financial position even if cruises are suspended for 12 months or even considerably longer, which is not at all what we anticipate. As you may know, Norwegian Cruise Line is part of a leading global cruise company, which last year recorded its sixth consecutive year of record revenue and earnings per share. Despite being the third largest cruise operator, we consistently led the industry across all net yield metrics, with 2019 marking the seventh consecutive year of net yield growth.” By the time this extraordinary statement was issued in May, all cruise operators recognized that any revenues for 2020 could pretty much be written off. As the year progressed, the situation went from bad to worse. NCL ships were resting at anchorages off both coasts of North America and around Europe. For a while the *Norwegian Jewel* sat offshore in Long Beach, where it returned later in the year. By August, the company decided to move seven of its ships from American shores to various points around Europe. While the ships didn’t actually travel together, some nicknamed the operation the “COVID-19 Convoy.” The last of the ships, the 155,873-ton *Norwegian Epic*, arrived at Naples on August 18.

A sad and historic note marks the passing of Knut Kloster on September 20, 2020, at age 91. He was a visionary, largely responsible for developing the modern cruise industry, beginning in 1966 when he brought the newly built car ferry *Sunward* to the Port of Miami. Originally partnered with Ted Arison, who later became his rival at Carnival, he founded Norwegian Caribbean Lines, which evolved into today’s Norwegian Cruise Line. Among his many other innovations, he developed the first cruise line-owned private island, Great Stirrup Caye, in the Bahamas, and introduced the first modern mega-ship to the world with his purchase of the SS *France*, which was transformed into the warm-weather cruiser *Norway*, introduced in 1980.

## **Oceania Cruises**

Oceania produced little in the way of news during 2020. Like other companies within Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings, the six-ship fleet found itself out of service after mid-March, and by the end of summer and into autumn, the ships headed for lay-up in Europe. Fleet refurbishment projects under the OceaniaNEXT initiative have been postponed, and the two new ships announced last year will no doubt be pushed back. By December 2020, the company had cancelled cruises on all of its ships through at least April 2021.



■ *One of the most luxurious ships in the world, Seven Seas Splendor made it as far as San Diego, California, before the pandemic pushed aside its entry into service. – Photo courtesy of Fincantieri.*

## **Regent Seven Seas Cruises**

Regent Seven Seas took delivery of its latest vessel, *Seven Seas Splendor*, on January 30, 2020. The 56,000-gt ship had a busy few weeks beginning its first transatlantic crossing from Barcelona on February 6, ahead of the official christening in Miami on February 21. Supermodel Christie Brinkley served as godmother at the elegant ceremony. The singer Seal provided musical entertainment. Additional inaugural activities planned on the West Coast had to be cancelled when the new ship was laid up. The ship is a sister of the 2016-built *Seven Seas Explorer*, with a third ship in the series still coming.

## Genting Hong Kong

Genting Hong Kong consists of the Asian operations of Dream Cruises and Star Cruises, along with the global operations of Crystal Cruises. Genting Cruise Lines also builds all its new ships at its own shipyard, MV Werften, in Germany. The group lost money in 2019 and is expected to lose significantly more with the coronavirus shutdown in 2020. The shipyard was also forced to close for a time due to the pandemic. Two ships currently under construction for Crystal and Dream Cruises will be delayed by about a year. The cruise group became the most-likely-to-fail during the summer of 2020. On August 20, the Genting suspended all payments to creditors, triggering a 36-percent drop in the company’s shares, and listed \$3.4 billion in debt. The company is controlled by Malaysian business tycoon Tan Sri Lim Kok Tay, who as of April owned 69 percent of the shares of the Hong Kong division. Luxury operator Crystal Cruises was forced to issue frantic statements that it was not going out of business. That, like many things for the parent company, remains to be seen.



■ *The Explorer Dream, seen here in May 2019, introduced new health and safety protocols and was able to resume summer cruising from Taiwan. – Photo by Catechin, CC BY -SA 4.0 International.*

## Dream Cruises

Dream Cruises was forging ahead with building plans for its new generation of ships capable of carrying 5,000 (double occupancy) to 9,500 (maximum) passengers, despite the global shutdown. The first of those ships, the 208,000-gt *Global Dream*, was scheduled to enter service in 2021, although that will now be delayed by a year. Aboard will be “Dream Park at the Pier,” billed as the very first theme park at sea. It will feature the world’s longest roller coaster at sea, called the “Space Cruiser by Dream Cruises.” The roller coaster is currently being built and

tested on land near the MV Werften shipyards in Germany before final installation on the vessel. Unless plans are scaled back, *Global Dream* will be the first of three 1,122-ft ships in its class. At a cost of \$1.8 billion, it will be the most expensive passenger ship built to date, as well as being one of the largest.

In Asia, Dream Cruises was among the earliest to return with two- and three-day cruises aboard its smallest ship, the 75,338-gt *Explorer Dream* (ex *Superstar Virgo*). Service resumed on July 26 with “Taiwan Island Hopping” out of Keelung. Taiwan had a remarkably low rate of COVID-19 infections, and the ensured that all crew members went through multiple periods of quarantine and testing before being allowed aboard. Only 1,200 passengers from Taiwan could be guests on these local cruises. Under a new global healthcare certification, *Explorer Dream* was the first ship to receive the Certification in Infection Prevention-Maritime, which will be known as CIP-M. The ship was built for Star Cruises in 1999 before transferring to its Dream division in 2019. The 2017-built *World Dream* also resumed two- and three-night cruises out of Singapore, which were only being sold to local residents.



■ *Superstar Aquarius and its sister spent 2020 as accommodation ships at Singapore, where they were able to test new health measures in-port that will be applied when the entire corporate fleet is able to resume cruising. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*

## Star Cruises

Star Cruises had two of its sister ships used as accommodations for foreign workers at Singapore during the coronavirus pandemic. *Superstar Gemini* (ex *Dreamward*, *Norwegian Dream*) and *Superstar Aquarius* (ex *Windward*, *Norwegian Wind*) also provided a real-world platform to successfully assess various health protocols including safe distancing practices, the ships’ ventilation systems and preventive and infection-control measures. This in-port experience

helped to define standard operating procedures, which were then incorporated across the entire Genting Hong Kong fleet.



■ *Crystal Serenity rests at Hong Kong on March 14, 2008. Crystal Cruises reached its 30th anniversary year but in uncertain conditions under the ownership of Genting Hong Kong. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*

## Crystal Cruises

Crystal Cruises, like everyone else, had its ships laid up for most of the year. Its first new build since the *Crystal Serenity* in 2003 was originally scheduled to debut in 2020 but had its delivery pushed back to 2021, although this decision was made before disease ravaged the world. When completed, *Crystal Endeavor* will be a 25,000-gt expedition vessel, constructed by the Genting-owned MV Werften yard in Stralsund, Germany. It will be the first in what’s expected to be a trio of identical ships. Genting Hong Kong came up with a plan to sell and lease back the incomplete ship, but on December 22 it was announced that the deal had officially fallen through.

July 24 came and went with no ships sailing, but the date marked a special anniversary for the company. Thirty years earlier, in 1990, its first ship, *Crystal Harmony*, sailed from San Francisco to Alaska on its maiden voyage marking the seagoing beginnings of Crystal Cruises. The company has maintained a prestigious reputation ever since. Genting Hong Kong purchased the company from Japan’s NYK in 2015. It would not be a happy anniversary as speculation swirled through the travel industry regarding Crystal’s continued viability. The line had to take the extraordinary step of issuing the following statement: “It is important to understand that the company is not going out of business. Whatever option our parent company pursues, it will allow Crystal to operate its business.” The cruise line has been slow to issue refunds to passengers on cancelled sailings.



■ *The MSC Magnifica has become MSC Cruises’ preferred ship for world cruises and for phasing in its service reentry. The ship sailed half of 2020 in spring and fall. It’s seen here at Los Angeles on February 6, 2019. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*

## MSC Cruises

MSC Cruises is unique among the four major cruise groups in that it’s a privately owned company. Therefore, it’s a bit harder to determine the exact financial impact of the worldwide shutdown of its operations, but suffice it to say that, like the other cruise companies, it was substantial. MSC has one of the largest containership operations in the world and has been building new cruise ships at a fantastic pace over the last two decades.

MSC Cruises’ 95,118-gt *MSC Magnifica* was on the line’s second world cruise when the outbreak of coronavirus became known. The ship was among the last ones sailing when the voyage terminated at Marseille, France, on April 20. Meanwhile, once the peak of the crisis had passed in France, work continued on fitting out the new 181,000-gt *MSC Virtuosa* at the Chantiers de l’Atlantique shipyard in St. Nazaire. When completed, it will be among the largest-capacity ships in the world with a double occupancy of 4,888 passengers, but jumping to 6,297 with all berths filled. At the same yard, on June 29, 2020, the traditional coin ceremony under the keel was carried out as construction began on the 205,700-gt *MSC Europa*. Delivery is still set for 2022 for the LNG-powered mega-liner, which will carry 5,264 passengers based on double-occupancy. However, once again maximum capacity with all berths filled will reach 6,761, the highest in the world, eclipsing that of its newbuilding fleet mate. The four ships of the “World Class” on order will be just a few inches shy of 1,094 feet long.

MSC Cruises attempted to restart operations, using only two ships, with the August 16 departure of the 181,000-gt *MSC Grandiosa*, new in 2019, sailing from Genoa on a seven-night

Western Mediterranean cruise. It was to be followed on August 29 by *MSC Magnifica*, sailing out of Bari on a seven-night Eastern Med Cruise, but that was delayed until September 26 due to increased testing measures for citizens of Italy travelling to Greece and a softness in demand. COVID-19 testing, with results returned in 30 minutes, was required of all passengers before boarding. Passengers wouldn't be allowed to go ashore independently but must be on an MSC-sponsored shore excursion to even disembark. On the first cruise, one family learned that these rules were to be taken seriously as they intentionally separated from their tour and weren't allowed to reboard. In accordance with increased travel restrictions by the Italian government, cruises over the Christmas and New Year period were cancelled. Over at the Fincantieri shipyard in Monfalcone, Italy, on August 20, 2020, the *MSC Seashore* met water for the first time as the huge ship was floated from its building dock. At 1,112 feet in length, it became the longest ship in the MSC fleet, and, at 169,380 gt, it's currently the largest ship ever built in Italy. It was expected to enter service in July 2021.





■ Viking Sun is one of six identical 47,842-gt sisters already built. A total of 16 are planned. This view was taken in the outer harbor of Los Angeles on January 4, 2018, when the ship was new. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.

## Viking

### Viking Ocean Cruises

Viking Ocean Cruises held an event in mid-January in Beverly Hills, California, to announce details of its two new expedition ships, scheduled to arrive in 2022. The chosen names for the 30,150-gt, 378-passenger ships were *Viking Ocantis* and *Viking Polaris*. Initial renderings show them to be sleek, attractive vessels. Each hull will be built to Polar Class 6 ice standards by the VARD shipyard in Romania, with the final outfitting to be completed in Norway. These ships will inaugurate Viking voyages on the Great Lakes as well as operate itineraries from the Arctic to Antarctica and everywhere in between. Not wasting time, the first of the pair was floated out at Fincantieri's VARD yard in Romania on December 22, 2020.

### Viking River Cruises

Meanwhile, Viking River Cruises announced that, after seven years of planning, it will introduce modern U.S.-flagged riverboats on the Mississippi River beginning in August 2022. The first ship, named *Viking Mississippi*, will carry 386 guests, spread across five decks. After those early promising announcements, on March 11, 2020, Viking suspended all its operations, becoming the first line to do so. The initial period of the shutdown was scheduled to last until April 30, then was quickly extended to June 30, a longer time frame than any other cruise companies initially planned. As time would tell, the pause would be much longer than that, but the early optimism was typical of all cruise lines, which were itching to return to service. Unlike other lines, Viking spent much of the time in shutdown, developing realistic procedures that should be successful when an eventual restart would happen. Having smaller ships with a maximum of 930 passengers certainly helps. Viking was also the first to introduce PCR (Polymerase Chain

Reaction) testing aboard all ships, with the capability of daily COVID-19 test results for all passengers and crew in its onboard laboratory.

This line has vowed not to resume cruising until it’s completely safe to do so. News coming late in the year has the 930-passenger *Viking Sun* transferring to Chinese registry in 2021. This will be the first ship in a joint venture agreement between Viking Cruises and China Merchants Shekou Industrial Zone Holdings to offer the first five-star luxury cruise experience for domestic Chinese service. Viking already has six ships of this 47,800-gt class in service, with many more on order for future deliveries through 2027 and beyond. Chinese investment capital helps fund much of Viking Cruises’ phenomenal development ambitions.



■ *The Italian-built Scarlet Lady, being put through its paces in February 2020, has yet to host a paying passenger. A nearly complete sister, Valiant Lady, is waiting in the wings. – Photo courtesy of Virgin Voyages.*

## Virgin Voyages

Virgin cancelled its New York debut events, scheduled for the end of March, as the coronavirus spread and decimated not only humans but the cruise industry. Its first ship, the newly built *Scarlet Lady*, was intended to enter into regular service from Miami on short cruises visiting The Bahamas and Mexico on April 1, 2020. The ship, introducing something different to the cruise industry, was met with mixed reviews. As one commenter quipped, “Looks like they tried to reinvent the wheel, and created a cube.” The radical interior design includes small cabins with little furniture, no end tables, no drawers or other storage space save for one closet. The main light switch for the room is located inside said closet. Décor runs toward something akin to a Las Vegas hotel, eschewing all things nautical. While exterior decks are spacious, there is only one small swimming pool midships for the large complement of cruisers. Perhaps this new approach will find a market, but it’s difficult to see how the company will source 2,770 sailors (not passengers) every five days to fill one ship, let alone the projected four ships it’s planning.

The *Scarlet Lady* entered lay-up first in Miami, then anchored offshore of Ft. Lauderdale, where the first Virgin ship remained a virgin. Its only guests have been those who previewed the ship at Dover and Liverpool before it headed to North America. A second ship, given the name *Valiant Lady*, was originally scheduled for April 2021 service. That has now been pushed back until at least November. It’s nearing completion at the Sestri-Ponente yard of Fincantieri near Genoa, Italy, the birthplace of many famous Italian liners.



■ *The Astoria at sunrise off Puerto Penasco, Mexico, on January 20, 2020. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*

## Cruise & Maritime Voyages

CMV began the year with high hopes for the future. The *Columbus* (ex *Sitmar Fairmajesty*, *Star Princess*, *Arcadia*, *Ocean Village*, *Pacific Pearl*) would be operating a world cruise. The recently acquired *Vasco da Gama* (ex *Statendam*, *Pacific Eden*) had completed a successful first season for the line. And the diminutive 552-passenger *Astoria* (ex *Stockholm*, *Volkerfreundschaft*, *Volker*, *Fridtjof Nansen*, *Italia I*, *Italia Prima*, *Valtur Prima*, *Caribe*, *Athena*, *Azores*) became the first ship to inaugurate a series of three 11-night cruises from Puerto Penasco, Mexico, through the Sea of Cortez, which began on January 9. The 16,144-gt ship still retained the title as the oldest operating cruise liner in the world. It was built in 1948 and reached the age of 72 in February 2020. Then the coronavirus pandemic swept the world. Britain was among the countries particularly hard hit.

The future of older ships, such as those in the growing Cruise & Maritime Voyages fleet, became precarious almost overnight. With service suspended, the company revealed the locations of its fleet in lay-up. The *Columbus*, *Vasco da Gama*, *Astoria* and *Magellan* (ex *Holiday*, *Grand Holiday*) spent most of the year at the Tilbury docks near London. The classic liner *Marco Polo* (ex *Aleksandr Pushkin*) spent its idle days in the west over at Bristol-Avonmouth, England. And the largely German-based *Astor* (ex *Astor*, *Fyodor Dostoevskiy*) remained at dock in Bremerhaven. Had the world not changed in 2020, plans called for that ship to be renamed *Jules Verne* in 2021, for a new French division of the company called *Croisières Maritimes et Voyages*.

Through the spring, the company remained upbeat for the future, unveiling the name of its latest addition, scheduled to enter service in April 2021. *Amy Johnson* was the new name chosen for the former *Pacific Dawn* (ex *Regal Princess*). At 70,588 gt, it would have been the company’s largest ship to date. Instead, it joined the long list of ships going for scrap. Most of the line’s vessels followed the naming theme of notable world explorers. The latest would have been named for the popular pioneer British aviator, who became the first woman to fly solo from England to Australia in 1930. CMV also planned to introduce another new purchase with the renamed *Ida Pfeiffer* (ex *Ryndam, Pacific Aria*). Sold to CMV in 2019 to operate under CMV’s German brand, TransOcean Kreuzfahrten, the final purchase was never consummated.

Unfortunately, on June 22, the U.K. Maritime and Coastguard Agency sequestered five of the six CMV ships because of concerns about crew welfare and late payment of wages. Most of the ships were being maintained in hot lay-up with their crews still aboard, with hopes for a quick return to service. But the money ran out and it all turned out for naught. During the week of July 20, Cruise & Maritime Voyages went into administration, the British equivalent of bankruptcy. Due to the “global pandemic of seismic proportions,” the line has “ceased trading with immediate effect,” according to administrators Duff & Phelps.

The company was founded in 2009 and had just celebrated 10 highly successful years in November 2019 with the introduction of the *Vasco da Gama*. Eight months later it had become the largest cruise line to go out of business in the current climate. Unless there was a miracle investor, one of the most interesting remaining cruise lines, and one of the few operators of quality, older, second-hand ships, would be no more. But on August 28, a ray of hope appeared. A released statement read: “The administrators of insolvent Cruise & Maritime Voyages confirmed the sale of U.K. commercial assets to CVI Group Limited, a company owned by Christian Verhounig, former chief executive of CMV.” Those assets included customer databases; computer systems, including websites and booking systems; office furniture and equipment; information technology infrastructure; intellectual property and motor vehicles. Just days later came the disappointing news that the revival attempt had failed. The five company-owned ships, including the 55-year-old *Marco Polo*, were auctioned off in October. In the words of Christian Verhounig, Cruise & Maritime Voyages had developed “a much-loved brand over the past decade,” by providing a “hugely popular value-based niche no-fly cruise product,” aboard a fleet of smaller, attractive vintage ships. The loss of CMV nearly eliminates that style and link to cruising’s past.

Throughout October the ships of CMV were auctioned off to the highest bidders. The *Vasco da Gama* went to Portuguese buyers for the highest price of \$10.2 million. The buyers turned out to be Mystic Investments, which will operate it under its German-based brand, Nicko Cruises. Although this ship is much larger than any other vessel in its fleet, the ship already is a known commodity in the German-speaking market, having sailed many years under charterer Transocean Tours, which in more recent years has been a division of Cruise & Maritime Voyages. The *Astor* and *Marco Polo* were both sold for scrap. The *Astor* is already half broken up at Aliaga, Turkey. *Marco Polo*, arguably one of the last traditional Atlantic liners, is set to arrive mid-January at Alang, India. The buyers of the magnificent *Columbus* were first reported to be Turkish interests, but later it was revealed that the ship would join the fleet of new cruise operator Seajets. The *Magellan* also went to that same group, joining a number of other ex-Carnival Corporation-owned ships.



■ *The new Spirit of Adventure meets its Saga-sister Spirit of Discovery for the first time, at the London Tilbury docks in October 2020, with Astoria in the foreground. – Photo courtesy of Saga Cruises.*

## Saga Cruises

Saga delayed the scheduled August introduction of its new 58,250-gt *Spirit of Adventure*. The ship was constructed by the Meyer Werft shipyard at Papenburg, Germany, which has had work delays along with financial problems due to the COVID-19 crisis. On July 24, it was floated out of Building Hall #5, and during the process had the bright yellow funnel lifted and mounted onto the ship by crane to complete its attractive profile. The 999-passenger ship was designated as yard number 715, and in a nearly complete state in August made the trip down the River Ems at the time it should have been celebrating its maiden voyage. Final outfitting would be completed at the port of Emden, with sea trials to begin in the autumn. *Spirit of Adventure* is identical to the highly regarded *Spirit of Discovery*, delivered in July of 2019. These are the first new ships designed and built for Saga. Each is 774 feet long and 102 feet wide and cruises at a modest 18 knots. They met for the first time upon the new ship’s arrival at Southampton in October.

In other Saga news, the veteran *Saga Sapphire* (ex *Europa*, *Superstar Europe*, *Superstar Aires*, *Holiday Dream*, *Bleu de France*) has been sold to Turkish operator **Anex Tour** for future service. The ship was built in 1981 as a 37,301-gt luxury cruiser for Hapag-Lloyd. Its post-German career was somewhat checkered before it was acquired by Saga Holidays in 2012. Carrying only 706 passengers, the ship is extremely comfortable. With the remainder of its Saga Cruises itineraries cancelled by the pandemic, it sailed from London Tilbury at the end of July bound for Turkey with the new name of *Blue Sapphire* already in place.



■ *The Boudicca was built in 1972 as the Royal Viking Sky. All the original Royal Viking Line trio were sold in 2020 for stationary hotel roles. – Photo courtesy of Fred. Olsen Cruise Line.*

## Fred. Olsen Cruise Line

Fred. Olsen placed its entire four-ship fleet in lay-up at an anchorage on the Firth of Forth in Scotland. In other circumstances it would have been a grand sight to see the vintage vessels together. It would prove to be the last chance to see them at all. In midsummer they were moved from their anchorage to the harbor at Rosyth. Looking toward the future, the cruise line purchased the 62,000-gt sister ships *Rotterdam* and *Amsterdam* from Holland America Line in July. The new acquisitions were quickly renamed the *Borealis* and *Bolette*. They were built in 1997 and 2000 respectively for worldwide cruising, with each carrying around 1,400 passengers. They would replace the oldest members of the current fleet, *Black Watch* (ex *Royal Viking Star*, *Westward*, *Star Odyssey*) and *Boudicca* (ex *Royal Viking Sky*, *Sunward*, *Birka Queen*, *Golden Princess*, *Superstar Capricorn*, *Hyundai Kumgang*, *Grand Latino*), both of which were built in 1972 and carry only 804 to 856 passengers. Despite major refits that included new engines to prolong their lifespans, the 48-year-old ships are likely candidates to be scrapped soon. For the moment, the two have gone to Turkish buyers for use as stationary accommodation ships.

With no chance for planned farewell voyages, the line offered the opportunity to remember these famous ships online over a two-week period that began August 24. The demise of competitor CMV may be good news for Fred. Olsen. The *Braeman* (ex *Crown Dynasty*, *Crown Majesty*, *Norwegian Dynasty*), built in 1993, relatively small at 24,344 gt and carrying just 989 passengers, is scheduled to resume service for the winter 2021/22 season with a home base of Havana for departures visiting both the Western and Eastern Caribbean. The larger 43,537-gt *Balmoral* (ex *Crown Odyssey*, *Norwegian Crown*, *Crown Odyssey*, *Norwegian Crown*), built in 1988 and lengthened in 2007, also looks likely to continue in service, keeping the fleet at four ships. On September 17, the *Bolette* (ex *Amsterdam*) sailed under the Forth and Queens Ferry bridges into Rosyth, joining its sister *Borealis* (ex *Rotterdam*), which had been delivered two weeks earlier. All the ships together presented a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to witness the passing of the torch between different generations within the fleet. The two newest members were to be redecorated to Fred. Olsen style at Babcock’s Rosyth Facilities in Scotland ahead of their planned entry into service in March 2021.



■ For the first time, all four Disney ships were together in the same place. Photo taken at Brest, France, on October 14, 2020. – Photo courtesy of Chipandco.com.

## Disney Cruise Line

Disney Cruise Line has postponed the arrival of its fifth ship, the *Disney Wish*, repeatedly. It’s scheduled to enter service in the summer of 2022. It will be the first in a trio of 2,500-passenger ships being built by the Meyer Werft shipyard in Papenburg, Germany, powered by LNG. Their estimated gross tonnage has now been raised from 135,000 to 144,000 tons. They will be larger than the previous pair of ships, *Disney Dream* and *Disney Fantasy*, at 129,690 gt, but will have a similar passenger count. With all the children’s berths filled, the complement increases to 3,500 guests. But even the magic of Disney couldn’t stop the surge of the coronavirus pandemic, which kept its fleet of ships laid up for the remainder of 2020. The end of October found all four members, including the earlier 83,000-gt sisters *Disney Magic* and *Disney Wonder*, together for the first time, idled at the Damen shipyard in Brest, France.





■ *The Celestyal Experience, in both size and quality, represents a considerable upgrade to the fleet. It was acquired in 2020 from Costa Cruises. – Photo courtesy of Celestyal Cruises.*

## **Celestyal Cruises**

Celestyal, part of the Louis Group, maintained one of the most sensible timelines for potentially returning to service. Early on the company suspended operations until March 2021, the farthest out of any cruise line at the time. During that downtime, they took advantage of the massive number of ship sales by purchasing the 1993-built *Costa Neoromantica* (ex *Costa Romantica*) from Carnival Corporation. The 57,130-gt ship is now the largest in the fleet and has been renamed *Celestyal Experience*. The 1,578-passenger ship had a radical redesign completed in February 2012, which added a three-deck-high block of cabins atop the bridge and balconies. Celestyal intends to make it its flagship once service resumes. When that day comes, the company will have three ships, including its existing *Celestyal Crystal* (ex *Viking Saga*, *Sally Albatross*, *Leeward*, *Superstar Taurus*, *Silja Opera*, *Crystal*, *Louis Cristal*) of 1980 and *Celestyal Olympia* (ex *Song of America*, *Sunbird*, *Thomson Destiny*, *Louis Olympia*), built in 1982.



■ *The Artania of Phoenix Reisen may have remained at sea with passengers longer than any other cruise ship after the coronavirus pandemic hit. This photo was taken at Freeport, Bahamas, on April 15, 2018. – Photo by Peter Knego.*

## Phoenix Reisen

Phoenix Reisen continued sailing throughout the first quarter of the year because most of its ships were on world cruises. In fact, its largest ship, the 45,488-gt *Artania* (ex *Royal Princess*, *Artemis*) didn't return to Bremerhaven, Germany, until May 31, and by that point there were just eight passengers remaining aboard. Previous stops were made in Bali and Manila to drop off crew members. Before the virus, Phoenix Reisen was having a very productive year. Its newest acquisition, the 38,100-gt *Amera* (ex *Royal Viking Sun*, *Seabourn Sun*, *Prinsendam*) was doing very well, although it seemed to siphon off passengers from the more veteran members of the fleet, which wanted to try something different. The ship was built in 1988 for the defunct Royal Viking Line and carries 835 passengers. The smaller 28,856-gt *Amadea* (ex *Asuka*) also operated a world cruise, which included North American stops along the California coast including a call at San Diego. Although that 1991-built ship has a capacity of 584 passengers, only about 240 joined for the full world cruise. The coronavirus pandemic claimed the oldest ship in the Phoenix fleet in October, when the 1973-built *Albatros* (ex *Royal Viking Sea*, *Royal Odyssey*, *Norwegian Star*, *Norwegian Star 1*, *Crown*, *Crown Mare Nostrum*) was sold. The classic 28,518-gt ship is expected to become a floating hotel in Egypt for the Pick Albatros Group.



■ The German FTI Group has decided to get out of the cruise business and has sold the 1980-built *Berlin*. – Photo courtesy of FTI Cruises.

## **FTI Group/Dreamliner Cruises**

FTI Group has announced that it will cease cruising and dismantle its one-ship cruise brand operated exclusively for the German market. The line had operated the *Berlin* (ex *Berlin*, *Princess Mahsuri*, *Berlin*, *Orange Melody*, *Spirit of Adventure*, *FTI Berlin*) since May of 2012. The intimate 9,570-gt ship had been popular since it was built by Peter Deilmann Reederei in 1980. In 1986, the ship was lengthened, increasing its original passenger capacity of only 330 to the current number of 420 passengers. After years of successful operations both for itself and charterers, Deilmann sold the *Berlin* to Saga Cruises in 2004, which ran it for the next seven years as the *Spirit of Adventure*. FTI acquired the ship in 2011, using it for eight years. The closing of the cruise operation is part of a broader restructuring at FTI, which has also seen the closing of its travel agency and hotel divisions and the laying off of up to 20 percent of its workforce. It was the fourth cruise operation to shut down permanently during the coronavirus pandemic. Dreamliner Cruises, part of an investment group, took possession of the *Berlin* in September and plans a complete renovation of the 40-year-old ship.



■ Looking considerably longer and sleeker is the *Star Breeze* after “stretching.” – Photo courtesy of Windstar Cruises.

## Windstar Cruises

Windstar continued with its \$250 million “Star Plus Initiative,” designed to lengthen and modernize the three motorships that were acquired from Seabourn. The first one, completed in mid-November, was the *Star Breeze* (ex *Seabourn Spirit*). On June 3, the stretched 522-ft ship was floated out of dry dock and transferred to wet dock for the completion of the project, which added 50 new suites, two additional restaurants, a larger pool and outdoor deck along with expanded public areas. The revitalized ship now carries 312 passengers, all in suites measuring at least 277 square feet. The new configuration brings the ship up to 12,995 gt. The work coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, so additional health features were added, including a new hospital-grade air filtration system that pairs with new virus-killing HEPA filters and UV-C irradiation treatments. A planned return to service is slated for April 2021. Its two sister ships *Star Legend* (ex *Royal Viking Queen*, *Queen Odyssey*, *Seabourn Legend*) and *Star Pride* (ex *Seabourn Pride*) are still on track to undergo similar transformations to be completed by the end of 2021.



■ *Le Commandant Charcot will be the largest vessel in the Ponant fleet both in terms of tonnage and number of passengers. It's also a true icebreaker with an innovative propulsion system. – Rendering courtesy of Ponant.*

## **Ponant (officially Compagnie du Ponant)**

Ponant refurbished its namesake, three-masted sailing yacht *Le Ponant*, to a highly luxurious standard. The 290-ft yacht was built in 1991 and has never looked better. The small ship features a one-to-one ratio of crew to passengers. The original vessel in the fleet provides a considerably different experience from the 10,000-gt, soft-expedition ships that make up the rest of the fleet. Ponant was one of the early companies to return to cruising. By July 23, it had eight ships sailing again, but with half of them operating itineraries only within France. Since each of its ships accommodates 264 or fewer passengers, there was no need to restrict capacity. Worldwide cruising will resume as soon as countries whose ports they visit reopen their borders. Beginning in February 2021, the 184-passenger *Le Laprouse* expected to offer cruises within the regional travel bubble of New Zealand, exclusively for passengers from that nation. Ponant also continued work on its largest ship to date, the 30,000-gt *Le Commandant Charcot*, which remains on schedule to arrive in April 2021. This hybrid-electric, LNG-fueled vessel is the first Arctic-designed Polar-class 2 passenger icebreaker capable of reaching 90 degrees North – the North Pole. This unique ship is being constructed at the VARD shipyard, which is now part of the Fincantieri Group, to accommodate up to 270 passengers.

## **Paul Gauguin Cruises**

Paul Gauguin Cruises became the second ocean-going cruise operation to restart following the worldwide COVID-19 crisis. The one-ship cruise line, now owned by Ponant, scheduled its first two voyages within Tahiti and the Society Islands on July 11 and July 18, 2020, exclusively for the local French Polynesian market. With a 10-night cruise beginning July 29, the 332-passenger

*Paul Gaugin* welcomed back international travelers for the first time. Unfortunately, just three days into that voyage, a passenger tested positive for COVID-19, and the cruise returned to port. The ship had planned to operate all the previously scheduled cruises for August. The 19,200-gt vessel was built in 1998 to cruise exclusively in Tahiti and the South Pacific. The small cruise line operated independently until August 2019, when it was purchased by Compagnie Du Ponant with plans to expand the operation. Both lines fly the French flag.



■ *MS Lofoten, the last classic ship on the Hurtigruten (Rapid Route) has been sold. In this view it's in the colors of its second owner, FFR (Finnmark Fylkes Rederi). – Postcard from the collection of Shawn J. Dake.*

## Hurtigruten

Hurtigruten temporarily suspended operations along the Norwegian Coast for the first time in its 128-year history. This took place on March 18, and it originally planned to resume service a month later, on April 19, 2020. During the shutdown, it offered the Norwegian government the option to deploy two of its ships in an amended domestic schedule, to bring critical supplies and goods to local communities along the Norwegian coast that are dependent on Hurtigruten. Instead, all operations worldwide were suspended on April 6. The inaugural Alaska season of the new *Roald Amundsen* was cancelled, initially until July before being aborted completely. The ship instead resumed cruising in Norway on July 17. On the second voyage, a week later, some crew members complained of feeling ill. Ultimately 42 crew and 29 passengers tested positive for COVID-19 after voyages with the ship. Making matters worse, before the test results came back, 177 passengers had been allowed to disembark from the ship into their communities after potentially being infected.

The two, early-resumption voyages of the *Roald Amundsen* did not bode well for a safe return to cruising on larger ships in international areas. The crisis could not have come at a worse time as the company was about to introduce its second newly built expedition ship, the *Fridtjof Nansen*. Its inaugural voyage had been scheduled for April 1 from Hamburg to the Norwegian Coast. Instead, it was pushed back to a planned late June start with a 40-percent reduction from

its 530-passenger capacity. That didn't happen, and later summer season cruises had to be cancelled after the debacle on its sister ship. A third expedition ship, the MS *Spitsbergen* (ex *Atlantida, Norway Explorer*) also had all its cruises scrubbed in the wake of the *Roald Amundsen* failure. Eventually, all Hurtigruten expedition ship voyages were cancelled for the remainder of 2020.

Along the Norwegian Coastal routes, when limited service first resumed, it was with the June 16 sailing of the 15,530-gt, 628-passenger *Finnmarken*, available only to the domestic Norwegian and neighboring Danish markets. About 250 passengers joined that first voyage. A short expedition cruise got underway from Hamburg on June 26. Had both the Norwegian Coastal and the Expedition Cruises gone well, Hurtigruten planned a return to a full schedule with 14 of its 16 ships back in operation by September. Instead, that same month Hollywood came to Norway. Actor/producer Tom Cruise chartered two of the ships, the new *Fridtjof Nansen* and the older, 1983-built *Vesteralen*, to house the cast and crew for his upcoming movie *Mission Impossible 7*, being filmed in the More og Romsdal region of northern Norway.

The last vintage member of the fleet of classic Norwegian coastal ships has been sold. The *Lofoten* was built in 1964 and had remained on the original route its entire career. Rather than being scrapped, the old vessel will begin a new career as a training ship at Sørlandet Maritime High School, planning to welcome cadets aboard beginning in August 2021. It's the fifth ship in the history of the maritime academy, replacing a former Hurtigruten fleet mate. In its 56-year career, the *Lofoten* has traveled over five million miles on its original main diesel engine.

The Hurtigruten-owned Norwegian shipyard Kleven Werft has filed for bankruptcy. Two weeks later, on July 14, the shipbuilding and repair business was taken over by Green Yard Group, a local recycling service. Existing operations will continue under the new name of Green Yard Kleven. Hurtigruten had only recently purchased 100 percent of the shipyard, in 2018, under the name KVE Holdings. The yard is the builder of its newest expedition ships.





■ *The Havila Capella after launching September 6, 2020, in Turkey. Building four sister ships for the Norwegian Coastal service has been a nightmare of delays at two shipyards. – Photo courtesy of Tersan Shipyard.*

## **Havila Voyages**

Havila launched the first two of its four new ships for the Norwegian Coastal service – 15,812-gt *Havila Capella* and *Havila Castor* took to the water at the Tersan Shipyard in Turkey on September 6, 2020. The original contract in Norway stipulated that the ships be in service by January 1, 2021. Not being able to meet that deadline, Havila had received approval to operate two replacement vessels instead, but with demand changing in a world altered by uncertainty, it was unclear if that would be necessary. The two new 468-passenger ships will be delivered later in 2021. The Spanish shipyard of H.J. Barreras cancelled the contract to build the third and fourth units of the quartet. Instead, the construction of *Havila Polaris* and *Havila Pollux* will be transferred to the Turkish yard.



■ Built in 1956 and retired in 1995, the *MS Ragnvald Jarl*, remarkably is scheduled to return to service with Vestland Classic. – Postcard from the collection of Shawn J. Dake.

## Vestland Classic

Vestland, which has operated the former Hurtigruten vessel *Nordstjernen* in the Spitsbergen Archipelago for a number of years, made the surprise announcement in September that it intended to bring back to life another retired Norwegian classic coastal liner. The former *Ragnvald Jarl* was sold out of Hurtigruten service in 1995, and was renamed the *Gann* and later *Sjokurs* when it was being used as a Norwegian maritime training ship under the ownership of Sørlandet Seilende Skoleskibs. Vestland Classic states that the ship will undergo modernization at a shipyard in Gdansk, Poland, before it makes a return to cruise service. Both of the company’s ships were built in 1956 at the Blohm+Voss shipyard in Hamburg, Germany. While future plans haven’t been disclosed, this will be a remarkable rebirth for the veteran ship, which has not seen a paying passenger in 25 years. The two ships will be among the oldest operating passenger ships in the world.



■ *The SeaDream I continued sailing in Norway throughout much of the pandemic but was sidelined after reaching the Caribbean and embarking American passengers. – Photo courtesy of SeaDream Yacht Club.*

## **SeaDream Yacht Club**

SeaDream became the first line to venture fully back into the world of cruising after shutting down during the early days of the coronavirus pandemic. With Europe opening up faster than many other destinations, *SeaDream I* (ex *Sea Goddess I*, *Seabourn Goddess I*) departed from Bergen, Norway, on a seven-day cruise to the Norwegian fjords on June 20, 2020. The small size of its two ships, at a maximum of 112 passengers, and the perceived safety of the Nordic destination allowed for an early return to service. During the pause in operations, the ships were laid up in Lisbon, Portugal, with crews remaining aboard who spent their time completing the World Health Organization’s official COVID-19 course for hygiene procedures and infection management and honing their safety skills, while they rejuvenated the already pristine 344-ft yachts built back in 1984 and 1985. In addition to numerous health and safety protocols onboard, each of the cabins has its own air system so there is no recirculated air.

The planning paid off, and both small ships were able to successfully complete the summer season in Norway followed by a planned resumption of Caribbean cruises in November from Barbados. Passengers arriving from the United States were asked to take as many as three COVID-19 tests before boarding the vessel. The Barbados government required anyone entering the country to present a negative test. People from high-risk countries such as the United States had to take a second test once they arrived, and finally, SeaDream was to test everyone again before embarkation.

The transatlantic crossing of the *Seadream I* left Norway with alternate embarkation points at Portsmouth and Rotterdam. It was the first cruise to depart the United Kingdom since the pandemic began. Carrying only 34 passengers, the extended voyage was a pleasant experience for those lucky few aboard. Seadream was so successful in safely operating its cruises up to that point that some guests elected to stay in the isolated, safe environment aboard rather than go home to face life in the scary real world. It was all fine until it wasn't. On the first cruise of the *Seadream I* out of Barbados, departing November 7, a group of seven passengers, and subsequently two crew members, came down with COVID-19 symptoms after previously testing negative for the disease. This occurred on the fifth day of the cruise, which was the first to have American and Canadian guests on board. The company cancelled all remaining voyages for the duration of the 2020/21 Caribbean season. They intended to resume service with European voyages in May 2021. SeaDream successfully operated more than 20 sailings during the pandemic without any cases. Although technically classed as yachts, they were among the only cruise ships that remained in service for much of 2020.



■ *The World Odyssey at San Diego on January 2, 2016. For the first time in its history, Semester at Sea was forced to cancel its fall and spring semesters. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*

## **Semester At Sea**

Semester At Sea, like so many others, was forced to curtail its spring 2020 semester voyage after having to skip several ports in Asia and being denied entry into the Seychelles due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The *World Odyssey* (aka *Deutschland*) terminated the cruise at Cape Town, South Africa, where its student cargo was able to disembark and fly home. The early end to the voyage cost nearly \$2 million, including about \$1.4 million in refunds. The organization later performed a nice gesture by sponsoring a “One Day for the Crew” fundraiser. Donations went to a newly formed “Crew Appreciation Fund,” which “allows us to ensure that these incredible humans still earn gratuities even though the ship is empty and honors their important contribution to our shipboard community.” Kudos to SAS for remembering the shipboard personnel, who have often been forgotten during the pandemic. With the number of COVID-19 cases around the world continuing to rise, Semester at Sea was forced to cancel its fall 2020 semester voyage; only the second time in its history has this been necessary. In a statement, it indicated that the demand for Semester at Sea remained high, but by August 21, 2020, it had issued a follow-up announcing that the spring 2021 voyage would also be cancelled. A portion of that statement read, “Due to COVID-19, protocols and directives do not yet exist to ensure the health and safety of all voyagers, crew, and the communities we visit around the world.... Never in our history have circumstances required us to cancel two consecutive voyages.”



■ Originally built for Carnival in 1987, *Grand Celebration* is shown here with original Bahamas Paradise Cruise Line livery in Freeport, Bahamas, in 2016. – Beyond My Ken photo, CC BY-SA 4.0.

## **Bahamas Paradise Cruise Line**

Bahamas Paradise Cruise Line realized even before the COVID-19 crisis was underway that it had more capacity than demand. With that in mind, it decided to place the 1,308-berth, 52,826-gt *Grand Classica* (ex *Costa Classica*, *Costa Neoclassica*) in lay-up for the months of March, April and May. During that time, its only other ship, the 47,262-gt *Grand Celebration* (ex *Celebration*, *Grand Celebration*, *Costa Celebration*) was scheduled to operate the two-day service from Palm Beach to Freeport, Bahamas. As it turned out, the company was prescient since neither ship would be able to sail for the majority of the year. Smaller cruise lines with older ships remain in a precarious situation since the coronavirus has proven more tenacious than anyone had first imagined. The cruise line announced its intention of restarting operations beginning November 4, 2020, with the *Grand Celebration* but would wait until March 3, 2021, to reintroduce the *Grand Classica*. The continuing no-sail order issued by the United States CDC prevented those plans. Showing how quickly things can change, instead of resuming service, the *Grand Celebration* was indeed sailing, but on its final voyage to Alang, India, to be scrapped. By December, the line was no longer taking reservations for any future sailings.

## Seajets

Seajets, the Greek operator of 21 high-speed ferries, appears poised to enter the cruise business as well. The line turned out to be the previously unidentified buyer of three cruise ships sold by Carnival Corporation during the first stages of the purge of older ships from that company’s fleets. The first to be purchased was the 77,499-gt *Oceana* (ex *Ocean Princess*), which had long been a fixture with P&O Cruises. The transaction took place in June 2020, with the 20-year-old ship being renamed *Queen of the Oceans*. In August came two more, this time from Holland America Line, with the purchases of the 55,575-gt, 1993-built *Maasdam*, renamed *Aegean Myth*, along with the 57,092-gt, 1996-built *Veendam*, which was promptly renamed *Aegean Majesty*. At auction in October, the company added a third sister, assuming ownership of the ship that was to have gone to CMV, the *Pacific Aria* (ex *Ryndam*), which was renamed *Aegean Goddess*. At a separate auction offering other ships of CMV, SeaJets unexpectedly obtained the 63,500-gt *Columbus* (ex *Sitmar Fairmajesty*, *Star Princess*, *Arcadia*, *Ocean Village*, *Pacific Pearl*) and the 46,052-gt *Magellan* (ex *Holiday*, *Grand Holiday*). Both were obtained at the bargain prices of \$5.32 million and \$3.43 million respectively. It’s not known what plans the line may have for its instant six-ship fleet, should cruising ever resume.



■ *Knyaz Vladimir resumed service in the Black Sea in mid-July. Russia’s only cruise ship, the “Prince Vladimir” is named for President Putin. – Alexleo photo, CC BY-SA 4.0.*

## **Black Sea Cruises, LLC/Sovfracht Group**

Black Sea Cruises is the operating name for the only ocean-going Russian cruise line. The actual name is the Sovfracht Group, which runs the *Knyaz Vladimir* (ex *Eagle*, *Azur*, *The Azur*, *Eloise*, *Royal Iris*, *Roy Star*) for the Russian Ministry of Transport, itself better known as Rosmoport. The 11,609-gt ship was built as a ferry in 1971 and previously sailed for P&O, Paquet, Chandris, Festival Cruises and the Israeli operator Mano Maritime. The group acquired the 764-passenger ship in 2017 for cruising in the Black Sea. Although Russia has severe problems with the coronavirus, the ship was among the early returnees to cruising, making its inaugural 2020 voyage on July 19. More than half the passengers embark the “Prince Vladimir” in Sochi for cruises to Novorossiysk, Yalta, and Sevastopol, where the ship overnights, although guests can board in any of those ports. The Russian authorities view the ship as an economic driver for those cities. The Soviet Union once had a massive fleet of passenger ships, but today this is the only one flying the Russian flag.





■ *The Orient Queen II was destroyed by a horrific explosion in Beirut, Lebanon, on August 4, 2020. – Photo courtesy of Abou Mehri Cruises.*

## **Abou Mehri Lines**

Abou Mehri Lines found their ship *Orient Queen II* (ex *Santa Cruz de Tenerife*, *Vistamar*) laid up in Beirut, Lebanon, when a devastating explosion destroyed the port on August 4. The 290-passenger ship listed, capsized, then partially sank at what had once been its berth in the harbor. Over a dozen Philippine crew members were missing and presumed dead. The 7,478-gt ship was built in Spain in 1989. After being sold to Abou Mehri, it was intended to be renamed *Med Queen*, but apparently that never took place. While not a large operation, this was the only cruise line to primarily source passengers from Lebanon. The ship was a total loss.



■ *The Gemini was originally the Crown Jewel, seen here on its maiden call to Los Angeles in November 1992. Miray International has chartered the 28-year-old ship for purposed service in the Greek Isles. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*

## **Miray International**

Miray International somewhat surprisingly chartered the often-laid-up ship *Gemini* (ex *Crown Jewel*, *Superstar Gemini*, *Celestyal Nefeli*) during the heart of the coronavirus pandemic. Conditions permitting, it had planned to operate it on three- and four-day cruises to the Greek Islands, with an intended startup date of August 31, 2020. The lovely small ship was built in 1992 for the now-defunct Crown Cruise Line. Since then, it has had a rather checkered past, sailing for major companies such as Cunard, Star Cruises and Celestyal Cruises, but it has also endured a variety of failed schemes and charters and long periods of lay-up. Following its very brief stint with Celestyal Cruises, the ship was chartered in 2017 to FEMA to house relief workers following the devastation of hurricanes Irma and Maria in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Returned to its owners Clipper Ship Management in March 2018, it regained the name *Gemini* and was offered for sale or charter. At 19,093 gt and carrying just 808 passengers, the ship is the perfect size for its new assignment in Greece. While nearly all other ships remained out of service, Miray has made a bold move, which, with luck and coronavirus permitting, should be successful. After the brief 2020 season following strict health protocols, plans call for an extended operation, adding shoulder season departures, from April through October 2021.



■ *The first Crown Princess of 1990 was with five P&O and Carnival Corporation brands before ending up in India as the Karnika. – Postcard from the collection of Shawn J. Dake.*

## **Jalesh Cruises**

Jalesh Cruises, which just started cruises on April 17, 2019, has gone out of business as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The one-ship company was the first major cruise operator based in India. Its ship was the 1990-built *Karnika* (ex *Crown Princess*, *A’Rosa Blu*, *Aida Blu*, *Ocean Village Two*, *Pacific Jewel*), which is well-remembered in North America for its time with Princess Cruises. Another big claim to fame for the 70,310-gt vessel is that it was largely responsible for reviving Italian shipbuilding when the order for the 804-foot ship was placed with the Fincantieri yard at Monfalcone, by Sitmar Cruises, which was taken over by Princess Cruises before construction progressed. The ship had a distinctive profile, including a large domed lounge above the bridge, causing its forward structure to resemble the head of a dolphin. Although in operation for only a year, the project was an ambitious attempt to open up a huge new market for passengers by the Mumbai-based Essel Group, which began marketing under the name Zen Cruises, later switched to Jalesh Cruises. Speculation on the future of this ship came to an end in October, when it was sold to NKD Maritime for just over \$5 million cash. The derelict ship had been abandoned off Mumbai, India, without even electricity aboard. It was the first major ship to be sold for dismantling at nearby Alang, India, due to the pandemic. Several other vessels of this size were sent for scrapping at Aliaga in Turkey.



■ *Cordelia Cruises plans to rise from the ashes of cruising in India with its purchase of the Empress of the Seas. – Photo courtesy of Royal Caribbean International.*

## **Cordelia Cruises**

Cordelia Cruises purchased the remaining assets of defunct Jalesh Cruises and will try again to restart cruising in India with a different ship. A month after that November purchase, they bought the 48,563-gt *Empress of the Seas* (ex *Nordic Empress*, *Empress of the Seas*, *Empress*) from Royal Caribbean International. Built in 1990 as the first new ship specially designed for three- and four-day cruises to the Bahamas, the 692-ft vessel currently carries 1,590 passengers. There is speculation that Cordelia may also have purchased Royal Caribbean’s *Majesty of the Seas*.

## **Peace Boat/Japan Grace**

Peace Boat is an organization run by Japan Grace that operates worldwide voyages to promote peace, human rights and environmental causes. Along with the company’s ambitions, the ships it operates on charter have grown in size over the years. Beginning in spring 2021, it will replace its two current vessels, the 35,190-gt *Ocean Dream* (ex *Tropicale*, *Costa Tropicale*, *Pacific Star*), built in 1982, and the 47,413-gt, 1992-built *Zenith*, with the newer, larger 77,441-gt *Pacific World* (ex *Sun Princess*), which was sold by Carnival Corporation in September 2020. The latest ship was built in 1995 for Princess Cruises and carries 1,950 passengers based on double-occupancy, or up to 2,419 at maximum capacity. The group says it will be a safer ship going into the post-pandemic world, with a large number of balcony cabins, a ventilation system bringing in outside air, plus larger interior spaces for a more physically distanced cruise experience. Its previous ships had been chartered from the now-defunct Pullmantur Cruises fleet. The *Ocean Dream* had been sailing for Peace Boat since 2012, while the *Zenith* had just joined in 2020 when the pandemic brought a halt to all voyages.

## **Mitsui O.S.K. Passenger Line, Ltd.**

Mitsui O.S.K. intends to be on the cutting edge of restarting cruising from Japan. With guidance rules from JOPA (Japan Oceangoing Passenger Ship Association), it ran some test voyages with plans to begin regular cruising in November 2020 with its 22,472-gt *Nippon Maru*. Initially the trips would be Japanese coastal sailings of one, two and three nights. There would be a total of 37 cruises operating through August 2021. The ship’s already-small capacity of 326 guests would be cut by 40–60 percent, with 20 cabins set aside as isolation rooms. Onboard modifications were made, including the installation of UVC lights in air ducts, whose radiation is known to be a viable disinfectant for air, water and nonporous surfaces. The HVAC system was modified to bring in only fresh outside air. All passengers will undergo coronavirus screenings, and crew will get tests before being allowed to board.

## **Sanya International Cruise Development Co., Ltd.**

Sanya bought the *Sea Princess* (ex *Sea Princess*, *Adonia*) when Carnival Corporation thinned out its Princess Cruises division in September. The ship was built in 1998 as part of a quartet by Fincantieri’s yard at Monfalcone, Italy. It measures 77,499 gt and carries 1,990 passengers based on double occupancy. This is the second large cruise ship to be operated by Chinese interests. Sanya has renamed the ship *Charming*.



■ *The Explorer on April 29, 2011, in more useful days with Semester at Sea, has been renamed Blue Dream Star as a casino ship in Asia. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*

## **Guo Meng Cruises**

Guo Meng became the latest owners of an often-traded cruise ship. The Hong Kong-based firm purchased the vessel from Diamond Cruise International, renaming it *Blue Dream Star* (ex *Olympic Explorer*, *Olympia Explorer*, *Explorer*, *Celestyal Odyssey*, *Glory Sea*). Completed in 2002, the 24,318-gt ship was originally built for defunct Greek operator Royal Olympic Cruises. Carrying a comfortable complement of 838 passengers, the vessel has also spent time with Semester at Sea, followed by Celestyal Cruises, before its two latest rolls in the Far East since 2015. Most likely it will continue to operate as a casino cruise ship once the pandemic eases.



■ *The National Geographic Endurance, with one of the most unique profiles at sea, is another new ship still awaiting its first passengers. – Photo courtesy of Ulstein Group.*

## **Lindblad Expedition Holdings**

Lindblad took delivery of its first polar expedition ship in March. The completion unfortunately coincided with the mothballing of ships worldwide. The new 12,300-gt *National Geographic Endurance* sports a blue hull and has some unique onboard elements such as the first dedicated polar art collection and glass-walled igloos, which appear to be quite attractive features. The unusual exterior design features an innovative Ulstein X-Bow, which slopes downward at a reverse angle from a traditional bow. The hull and engines were completed in Poland. From there the ship was towed to Norway, where it was completed by the Ulstein Shipyard in Ulsteinvik. The April maiden voyage was postponed although crew and staff had already been preparing on board. Meanwhile, a 126-passenger sister ship was named *National Geographic Resolution*, proceeding through the same steps in the building process. On October 22, the hull arrived in Norway, berthing at the same shipyard along with its new but untried sister. The second ship is still on track for delivery in the third quarter of 2021. When expedition cruising resumes, Lindblad should be well-positioned in the market with a growing fleet, including several new vessels. To ensure its viability to withstand the pandemic, in August Lindblad Holdings raised \$85 million through the private placement of convertible preferred stock.

## **Quark Expeditions**

Quark launched its first newly built ship, the 13,500-gt polar vessel *Ultramarine*, on May 16 from the Brodosplit Shipyard in Croatia. It was built as yard number #487. The 420-ft ship can accommodate 200 passengers and has several new features built in. For example, 20 Zodiacs can be launched from an internal garage with four embarkation points. Two separate helicopter pads can be operated simultaneously. The new ship has an extended-range, 40-day operational capacity. As a bottle broke across its bow, the ship was launched, stern-first, in the traditional method.





■ *The World Explorer, new in 2019, is the first ship in a planned series of seven vessels. It’s seen in two unique aerial views while cruising off Iceland. – Photos courtesy of Lauritz Schonfeld.*

## **Atlas Ocean Voyages/Mystic Cruises/Nicko Cruises**

Atlas Ocean Voyages has been formed to be the U.S. marketing arm for the series of new expedition ships that are also known as Mystic Cruises and Nicko Cruises in other countries. The first two vessels of the 9,300-gt class are the *World Explorer* and *World Voyager*, which are used by Nicko and on charter to other companies such as Quark Expeditions. In total, seven ships are planned for delivery following the first in 2019, and the final vessel is due in 2023. All are being built by the West Sea Shipyard in Viana, Portugal. The first ship specifically built for operations by Atlas Ocean Voyages, the 196-passenger *World Navigator*, was floated out on October 5, 2020, and was expected to enter service in June 2021, health conditions permitting. At the same time, the next ship in line, named *World Traveler*, has already had its keel laid. All the ships are Ice-class certified and would be considered all-inclusive luxury cruisers that will operate throughout the world.



■ *Ocean Victory* under construction in the China Merchants Heavy Industries Shipyard in Haimen, China. Built for Sunstone Ships, it will offer summer cruises to Alaska for American-owned Victory Cruise Line and spend winters under charter to Albatros Travel in the Southern Hemisphere. – Photo courtesy of Sunstone Ships.

## Sunstone Ships

Sunstone launched the second new ship in the Infinity series of 160–200-passenger ships being built by the China Merchants Heavy Industries shipyard in Haimen, China. It’s hoped that there will eventually be 10 near-sister ships of this expedition-type vessel. The latest is the *Ocean Victory*, which will sail under charter to Albatros Travel during the northern hemisphere winter months to Antarctica and during summers for Victory Cruise Lines to Alaska. Like the others built at the yard, the ship features the patented Ulstein X-Bow design. In its series of designs, *Ocean Victory* is technically ship number three. The vessel designated as number two is the newly named *Sylvia Earle*, which like vessel number one, *Greg Mortimer*, is being built for the Australian company Aurora Expeditions. The first steel for that ship was cut on March 16, 2020, the same week *Ocean Victory* was launched. Just to further confuse things, it will actually be the fourth ship launched in this series. Yet another steel cutting ceremony, for hull CMHI 196-5, which will become the *Ocean Odyssey*, took place on October 5 at the same Chinese yard. The latter vessel will do worldwide expedition cruises for Vantage Travel year-round. In an attempt to simplify the order of Infinity-class vessels being rapidly built, following the 2019 delivery of *Greg Mortimer* they are the *Ocean Victory*, *Ocean Explorer* and *Sylvia Earle* with delivery in 2021, to be joined in 2022 by the *Ocean Odyssey* and *Ocean Albatros*, and finally the *Ocean Discoverer* in 2023. All vessels ordered have long-term charter agreements in place.



■ *The Greg Mortimer, the first cruise ship built in China, seen at its launch in March 2019. Its operator, Aurora Expeditions, had a difficult end to its southern hemisphere season due to the pandemic. – Photo courtesy of Sunstone Ships.*

## **Aurora Expeditions**

Aurora had one of the more difficult first seasons. The March 15 cruise of the *Greg Mortimer* was kept at sea as 60 percent of the passengers and crew tested positive for coronavirus. The ship was allowed to dock in Montevideo, Uruguay, and disembark roughly 220 passengers and some crew. Before the world changed, the ship had been offering Antarctica cruises from Ushuaia, Argentina.



■ RCGS Resolute at Curaçao on April 3, 2020, looking little worse for wear after its encounter with the Venezuelan Navy. – Photo courtesy of Columbia Cruise Services.

## One Ocean Expeditions/Columbia Cruise Services

One Ocean Expeditions, which suffered numerous setbacks over the two previous years, appears to be finished. Its 184-passenger *RCGS Resolute* (ex *Society Adventurer*, *Hanseatic*), which it acquired on long-term charter in 2018 from Hapag-Lloyd, remained impounded in Buenos Aires for the first quarter of 2020. Then, in one of the most bizarre incidents in recent memory, the ship made headlines on March 30 when it engaged in a battle with the 262-ft Venezuelan naval vessel *Naiguata* (GC-23) off the coast of Isla La Tortuga – and won! There are disputing claims over whether the ships were in Venezuelan or international waters at the time of the incident.

The *RCGS Resolute* was sailing from Buenos Aires, Argentina, to Willemstad, Curaçao, and was officially carrying no passengers and only 32 crew, while being operated by Columbia Cruise Services. Venezuelan government officials said that they cannot rule out that the cruise ship “was transporting mercenaries to attack military bases in Venezuela.” Video shows crew aboard the littoral Naval patrol ship firing automatic weapons, repeatedly ramming, then crossing the bow of the 8,378-gt, 403-foot *RCGS Resolute*, causing only minor damage to the cruise ship. What the attackers didn’t count on was the staunchness of an ice-strengthened bulbous bow on the ice-class expedition ship. The *Naiguata* was fatally holed and sank. All 44 crew from the patrol vessel were rescued after their ship was sunk by their own miscalculations. This encounter had all the makings of a major international incident, ripe with political intrigue and enough suspicious elements to fuel endless conspiracy theories. The *RCGS Resolute* proceeded to Willemstad, while the Venezuelan Navy has one less ship on its register. German-owned Hapag-Lloyd will have to sell or find a new charter client for its once five-star-rated expedition ship with the demise of Canadian operator One Ocean Expeditions. The ship was offered for sale at an auction held in Curaçao on June 22, 2020.



■ *The Birka Stockholm was the only cruise ship of the nearly half-century-old Birka Cruises, which could not survive the financial fallout of the pandemic. The ship is seen cruising off Stockholm on June 2, 2013. – Photo courtesy of Arild Vagen, CC BY-SA 3.0.*

## **Birka Cruises**

Birka Cruises became one of the casualties of the COVID-19 crisis. In July 2020, the parent company, Eckerö Line, announced that the Birka division was shutting down after 49 years of operation. Their only remaining ship, the 34,924-gt *Birka Stockholm* (ex *Birka Paradise*), has been put up for sale. The ship was newly constructed for the line in 2004 as a dedicated cruise ship rather than a ferry and was used mainly on overnight cruises between Sweden and Finland. It was registered in Sweden and underwent a name change in 2013. Birka Line, as it was formerly known, had a limited but interesting history over the years the company was in service.

## **Silja Line**

Silja is primarily a large-ship ferry company and therefore not normally included in this review of cruise ships. But in 2020, everything was different. Throughout the early months of the pandemic, the Silja fleet remained idle, unable to cross on its international route between Sweden and Finland. But during the summer months, when Swedish people could travel freely within their own country, the 58,000-gt *Silja Symphony* began offering two- and three-night cruises to Visby on the island of Gotland. Limited to half the normal capacity, 1,400 passengers were carried on these fully booked voyages, showing that passengers had a pent-up appetite to travel. With summer over, the ship switched to once-a-week, two-night cruises on Fridays, sailing along the northern coast of Sweden. The car decks were used as a parking garage for the passengers' vehicles. A novel way to find employment for an otherwise idle ferry.

## Sea Cloud Cruises

Sea Cloud was supposed to debut its mammoth new sailing ship *Sea Cloud Spirit* (ex *Sea Cloud Hussar*) on August 29, 2020, with a long-delayed maiden voyage from Lisbon. Not surprisingly, the ship, which is being built by Metalships & Docks S.A.U. in Vigo, Spain, suffered further delays with work stoppages. Spain was particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 crisis. The giant masts for the ship, manufactured in Poland, arrived at the shipyard on time but weren't installed until July 31, when the 177-ft-high aft mast was erected. Below decks, the interior fittings were also being carried out, but not completed. On a revised schedule, the much-anticipated ship didn't cross the Atlantic in 2020 to position in the Caribbean after all, but instead postponed its maiden voyage until April 22, 2021, when it was expected to set sail from Palma de Mallorca on a 10-day “Tour of Spain” itinerary. The ship is 452.7 feet long, carries 27 sails with a total sail area of 43,055.64 square feet and is intended to be the largest full-rigged, three-mast sailing ship ever built.



■ After a long and disputed gestation period, the very large, Croatian-built sailing ship, intended to be the *Flying Clipper*, has found an operator that has renamed it *Golden Horizon*. – Photo courtesy of Brodosplit Shipyard.

## **Tradewind Voyages U.K. Ltd**

Tradewind announced in June that it would be the operators of the world’s largest square-rigged sailing vessel. The ship was then still owned by the shipyard and officially known only as Brodosplit 483. It was ordered by and intended for Star Clippers as its highly anticipated *Flying Clipper*, but disputes over completion caused the company to cancel the order, and the ship has remained laid up where it was built in Split, Croatia. Tradewind Voyages gave the unwanted ship a proper name at last when it was dubbed the *Golden Horizon*. The magnificent but troubled ship has made only one short cruise, an excursion trip for foreign journalists on September 2, 2019. It’s an impressive full-rigged, five-mast barque, designed to carry 272 passengers and measuring 8,770 gt. Built at an estimated cost of \$100 million, the ship is scheduled to enter service in May 2021 with nine voyages out of the United Kingdom, followed by an ambitious worldwide program. The company is headed by the former COO of Saga Cruises, and plans are already underway to add additional ships to the fleet.

## **Swan Hellenic**

Swan Hellenic has become the brand with nine lives. The defunct educational cruise line for adults was dismantled when it came under Carnival Corporation ownership, but it plans to rise again in November 2021 using two new ships. Behind the company are CEO Andrea Zito, former senior vice president of marine operations and newbuilding at Silversea Cruises, and General Manager John Warner, formerly a vice president at Toronto-based G Expeditions. The Polar-class expedition ships are currently under construction for the Russian-based Vodohod in Finland at the Helsinki Shipyard Oy. Each unnamed vessel is 361 feet in length and is designed to carry 148 passengers. The return of the fabled Swan Hellenic and the new ship orders were announced in July at a time when almost no cruise ships in the world were able to sail. A brave move during a difficult time.

## **Ritz Carlton Yacht Collection**

Ritz Carlton Yacht Collection has again pushed back delivery of its first vessel, *Evrima*, as problems continue with the Hijos de J. Barreras shipyard in Spain. After many delays due to labor issues at the shipyard, the first voyage of the 26,500-gt ship was reset to June 2020. But in March it had been further postponed until April 2021 due to work stoppages related to the COVID-19 outbreak in Europe. Spain was one of the early countries to suffer heavily from the spreading virus. Construction on a proposed second vessel has not begun, and it's likely that the order, placed in 2019, will be cancelled.

## **The World Resident Holdings, Ltd.**

The World has successfully operated the 43,188-gt residential cruise ship *The World* since 2002. The organization describes itself as a lifestyle that combines “a private yacht and a luxury vacation home. A home that takes you all around the globe.” The ship was taken out of service for the first time in its history on March 17 amid the rapidly expanding COVID-19 pandemic. *The World* had just completed a month-long excursion to remote sites in West Papua New Guinea. All residents, guests and non-essential crew disembarked by March 20 to Australia to return to their land-based homes. None have tested positive for the virus. The ship provides up to 165 individual “homes” with a typical average occupancy of between 200 and 330 residents and guests onboard at any one time. The minimal remaining staff onboard brought the ship across the Indian Ocean and through the Mediterranean to Gibraltar, where bunkering took place. It then proceeded to Falmouth, Cornwall, England, where it was to be laid up at the A&P Falmouth shipyard until the pandemic was safely over. With no sign of it ever being over, in September the ship was moved to long-term lay-up at Tenerife, Canary Islands.



## Ocean Residences

Ocean Residences intends to become the second and newest operator of a cruise ship designed for permanent residents. The company signed a contract to construct an 85,000-gt vessel, which will have only 118 residential apartments aboard. Configurations will range from two to six bedrooms. DIV Shipbuilding, which owns the Kleven Verft shipyard in Norway and the Brodosplit shipyard in Croatia, said both yards will work on the 950-ft ship, which they expect to deliver in 2024. The ship has been named the *Njord*, and will be nearly twice as big as the only other existing residential cruise ship, the 2002-built *The World*. Recalling an often-overused phrase, this may be the largest ship to ever be billed as “a private yacht.” It’s expected to make an annual leisurely cruise around the world.

## Victory Cruise Line

Victory is expanding beyond its two-ship fleet on the Great Lakes and Eastern Seaboard. Last year it was revealed that the company is planning to enter the ocean-going expedition cruise business with the new *Ocean Victory*, beginning in May of 2021. Doubling down, it will add the 8,500-gt, 344-ft, 200-berth sister ship *Ocean Discoverer* to its Alaska repertoire, beginning in 2023. The two identical ships will each feature 93 suites, of which 68 will offer balconies. Public rooms include two restaurants, an open-deck dining area, observation and lecture lounges, piano bar, library, gym, spa and swimming pool with a pool bar and a jacuzzi. The vessels will be chartered for the summer seasons from Sunstone Ships. Victory Cruise Line was purchased by the American Queen Steamboat Company in November 2018, which in turn is owned by HMS Global Maritime, better known for its fleet of 29 Hornblower Dining Yachts.



■ *American Jazz* became the third member of American Cruise Lines’ 190-passenger modern riverboat series. – Photo courtesy of American Cruise Lines.

## **American Cruise Lines**

American Cruise Lines has accelerated the delivery of the fourth and fifth units of its modern riverboat fleet to 2021, at least partially in response to the newly announced competition from Viking River Cruises. Number four of the 5,148-gt series will bear the name *American Melody*, while the fifth and, so far, final vessel remains unnamed. They will all be sisters, although the last two will feature some new design enhancements. For 2020, American Cruise Lines’ newest ship was the *American Jazz*, built by Chesapeake Shipbuilding, Salisbury, Maryland. If it could have, it would have begun cruising on the lower Mississippi River in September.



■ *The diminutive Grand Caribe at Rockport, Maine, on August 19, 2013. Blount Small Ship Adventures previously went by the name American Canadian Caribbean Line. By any title, the trips were a wonderful, intimate cruise experience. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*

## **Blount Small Ship Adventures**

Blount officially announced that it’s getting out of the cruise side of its business. Blount Boats also operates a domestic shipbuilding yard in Warren, Rhode Island. In August, news came out that it had put its two current ships, and one retired vessel, up for sale. The *Grand Caribe* and the *Grand Mariner* each carry 88 passengers and were built by Blount in 1997 and 1998 respectively. The earlier *Niagra Prince* was built in 1994 with a capacity for 76 passengers and has been idle since 2011. All three are now laid up at Warren, Rhode Island. This marks the first U.S.-based cruise line to cease operations as a direct result of the coronavirus pandemic. The line was founded by the late Luther Blount and has been cruising with passengers since 1966.

## **Un-Cruise Adventures**

Un-Cruise was the first American company to attempt restarting cruises strictly within Alaska on a Juneau-to-Juneau itinerary. It didn’t go well. The 60-passenger *Wilderness Adventurer* (ex *Caribbean Prince*) left on its cruise August 1 but had to return to port when a passenger tested positive for COVID-19. If the line had refused to embark any passengers until all test results were known, the cruise might have been completed, but they left while a single test result was still missing, an error that cost them a resumption of service. The remaining vessels in this fleet of nine small ships all sat out the entire Alaska season. Quarantined passengers from that one voyage all came back with clear results, but all upcoming cruises were cancelled. Both cruise lines and the State of Alaska were hoping that sailings could resume in 2021, since so much of the state’s tourism economy is fueled by passengers arriving on cruise ships.



■ *Sold! The former Costa Romantica (left) and the Costa Victoria (right) are two of the four ships that will no longer sail for Costa. The former went to Celestyal Cruises and the latter for scrap. They were photographed together at Port Everglades, Florida, on November 24, 1996. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*

## **Sold For Scrap**

After only one cruise ship being sold to the shipbreakers during the entire year of 2019, the parade of ships that made their final one-way voyages in 2020 was a long one. With all cruises idled by the COVID-19 pandemic and owners desperate for cash from their older, unused ships, many vessels met their premature ends once the extent of the damage to the industry became clear. Most of the vessels listed were happily sailing with paying passengers up until early March and were still quite viable cruise ships when they were run up onto the beaches of Turkey and India. As usual, this column pays a final tribute to these ships by including a brief biography and summation of their careers. The sad list commences in roughly chronological order of their sale.



■ *The Costa Victoria, seen here at San Juan, Puerto Rico, on December 8, 1998, was the first Carnival Corporation ship to be sold out of 19 planned disposals. It managed to remain intact throughout 2020 but will be broken up in 2021. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*

## ***Costa Victoria***

The spectacular *Costa Victoria* was the first ship to be sold by Carnival Corporation, sending it to a premature end in its native Italy (see update below). The 75,166-gt vessel was built in 1996 by the Bremer Vulkan yards in Germany as the last ship completed for Costa Cruises while the line remained a family-owned business. It can be recognized as the last of a long line of classic Italian ships with highly stylistic, contemporary Italian décor. With sleek lines and a four-deck-high lounge housed in the glass-fronted superstructure, this ship really made a statement at the time of its construction. The ship’s cabins were beautifully planned, with outside rooms featuring oversized round portholes, but that was also part of its undoing. The ship had no staterooms with balconies when that was becoming increasingly popular. Its proposed sister *Costa Olympia* was never completed.

After the purchase of Costa by Carnival Corporation, a large number of those porthole cabins had balconies tacked on, extending from the sides of the ship like a honeycomb. In its first years, it alternated cruising between the Caribbean in winter and the Mediterranean in summer. Toward the end of its career, it was mainly based in the growing Chinese market. In early July, the ship was relocated from Rome’s port of Civitavecchia to the small Italian town of Piombino, where it was announced that it would be scrapped. It was decommissioned in an arrangement designed to provide employment to the local shipyard workers. At the end of the year, the first ship to be sold had not begun to be dismantled. Although it remained intact through 2020, in early January 2021 it was being prepared for a tow to Aliaga, Turkey, where the not-yet-25-year-old ship would be broken up. For that last delivery voyage, portions of its name were erased, leaving it as the *ST Victoria*. The *Costa Victoria* should rightfully be remembered as one of the last great Italian ships for its modern Italian design elements and that wonderful flair that could only be found aboard Costa Cruises when it was still truly Costa.

Many of the remaining ships were scrapped at Aliaga since the operation there was more efficient and environmentally friendly than those in India. Six significant ships were beached at Aliaga in the initial phase of sales for demolition. But as the desire to get rid of unwanted ships at any price continued unabated, India began to see its share as well. Two historically important ships had arrived by the end of 2020 with several more on the way, scheduled to be beached in 2021. Others already sold remained in limbo, but are unlikely to ever sail again. The list continues:

## ***Monarch***

*Monarch* (ex *Monarch of the Seas*) was the first to go after Royal Caribbean shut down the Pullmantur division. It was beached at Aliaga, Turkey, on July 22, 2020. *Monarch* was the second in a three-ship series that put Royal Caribbean on track toward a steady stream of future growth in the big ship arena. At the time of its building, it was the largest ship in the world, at 73,937 gt, coming in just a smidge bigger than its earlier sister, *Sovereign*. It was launched on September 22, 1990, by the famous Chantiers de l’Atlantique shipyard in Saint-Nazaire, France. The maiden voyage took place a little over a year later, and seven-day Caribbean service started in November 1991. For most of its career it proved to be a reliable ship. There were some incidents, the most serious of which was a grounding off the island of St. Maarten in December 1998. Striking the reef opened up a gash over 131 feet long, and for a brief time the ship appeared in danger of sinking. While the damage was severe, after three-months work it was repaired in Mobile, Alabama, and resumed service.

In later years, *Monarch of the Seas* shifted to three- and four-day cruises, first to the Bahamas from Florida as well as from the Port of Los Angeles to Ensenada, Mexico. Although always popular, it was eclipsed by newer and much larger vessels that Royal Caribbean specializes in building, and in April 2013 it was transferred to the more down-market Pullmantur Cruises, focused primarily on the Spanish cruise market. The name was then shortened to simply *Monarch*, and it was repainted in Pullmantur’s blue livery. The ship has the dubious distinction of being the first in the world to beach at a scrapyards as a direct result of the coronavirus pandemic. Scrapping began in 2020 but was limited to sections of the forward superstructure. Undoubtedly it will be completely dismantled in 2021.

## ***Sovereign***

*Monarch*’s sister ship *Sovereign* (ex *Sovereign of the Seas*) beached right next to it the following day, July 23. This Royal Caribbean lady was a groundbreaking ship when it inaugurated service in 1988 as the first purpose-built megaship, which started a building frenzy that continues unabated to the present day. In its day, *Sovereign of the Seas* was the largest passenger ship in the world. Launched on April 4, 1987, it began its maiden voyage on January 16, 1988, from the Port of Miami. Built by the Chantiers de l’Atlantique shipyard in Saint-Nazaire, France, as Yard Number A29, its pleasantly rounded stern bore a resemblance to its predecessors constructed there, including the French Line’s *Normandie* and *France*.

She was the recipient of much publicity and very favorably received by guests. There were plenty of them – each voyage carried 2,324 passengers who enjoyed the amenities offered aboard a vessel of 73,192 gt that was 880 feet long and 106 feet wide. The ship continued with

Royal Caribbean for 20 years through 2008, before commencing service with the Pullmantur Cruises subsidiary on March 23, 2009, renamed *Sovereign*. The pandemic brought a premature end to its career. With the exception of a small section at the stern, the ship was completely gone by the end of 2020. The *Sovereign of the Seas* will always be remembered as a pioneer in the cruise industry and as the first major ship to sport a multi-deck atrium, known as the Centrum, connecting the vast array of public rooms and passenger accommodations.

### ***Carnival Fantasy***

Carnival sold its oldest ship, and leader of the eight-ship Fantasy-class, *Carnival Fantasy* (ex *Fantasy*). It was beached at Aliaga, Turkey, on July 28, 2020. The *Fantasy* and its sisters were all 855 feet in length with a beam of 103 feet. They were 70,367 gt and comfortably carried 2,052 passengers based on double occupancy. Each possessed a unique interior décor that was bright, loud and inventive with themed public rooms designed by Carnival’s chief architect, Joe Farcus. *Carnival Fantasy* spent most of its career in the short cruise market and was most recently based out of Mobile, Alabama, for the better part of a decade. By the end of the year the ship was mostly gone, cut back to the base of the funnel.

### ***Carnival Inspiration***

Following right behind was another ship of the class, *Carnival Inspiration* (ex *Inspiration*), which was beached at Aliaga, Turkey, on August 5, 2020. Built in 1996, this ship was the sixth in the series. Like the others, it was constructed by the Kvaerner Masa-Yards in Helsinki, Finland, as Yard Number 489, commencing its maiden voyage March 22, 1996. Much like its sisters, the *Inspiration* served Carnival primarily on seven-day service in the Caribbean while opening up a variety of new homeports. Its last assignment was offering twice-weekly three- and four-day cruises to Ensenada, Mexico, and Catalina Island, from its base at the Carnival-operated Long Beach Cruise Terminal in California. The short voyages were nearly always fully booked, operating up through February 2020. The *Carnival Inspiration* was driven hard into its final berth on August 5, 2020, crashing in between *Sovereign* and *Carnival Fantasy* and near the *Monarch*. All of them met their ends within two weeks of each other, becoming the first major vessels to succumb to the shutdown caused by the coronavirus pandemic.



■ Carnival Imagination *laid up offshore in Long Beach, California, in the early days of the pandemic, March 21, 2020. By September 16, the ship was at the scrapyards in Aliaga, Turkey, wedged against its sister Carnival Fantasy. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*

### ***Carnival Imagination***

Next to go was the *Carnival Imagination* (ex *Imagination*), another of the pair that had most recently been based at Long Beach, California. It was the fifth ship in the Fantasy-class series and entered service in 1995. During 2007, in common with all its sister ships, it had the Carnival prefix added to its name. It served nearly 25 years with the company and was a popular ship. Its dimensions were the same as its sisters, but like each vessel in the class, the wildly imaginative interiors were unique to the ship. Near the end of its career, it was the second ship to simultaneously offer three- and four-night cruises every week, but with departures on Thursdays and Sundays instead of the more traditional Friday and Monday rotation. As the COVID-19 pandemic took over, the ship unloaded its last group of passengers and proceeded to an anchorage just offshore in Long Beach. Although it had been previously announced that it would be held in cold lay-up, within weeks plans changed and it was sold for scrap.





■ *From the deck of the Carnival Imagination it was possible to view three gull-wing Carnival funnels in too-close proximity on September 18, 2020. Carnival Fantasy is in the center and Carnival Inspiration is on the left. – Photo by Meloy Lumbatan.*

*Carnival Imagination*, like the others, was de-stored at Willemstad, Curaçao, and began its final voyage from there to Aliaga on August 26, 2020. It was beached on September 16 coming to a grinding halt, resting against the port side of its older sister *Carnival Fantasy*, by that time already partially dismantled. For a time, it was possible to view three identical winged funnels of a class of ship that was such an important step in the development of Carnival Cruise Lines throughout the decade of the 1990s. At the end of 2020, very little work had proceeded on the euphemistically described “recycling” of *Carnival Imagination*.



■ *The Astor was a lovely little ship with an interesting career. It sailed for 33 years before becoming the sixth ship to meet its end at Aliaga, Turkey, in 2020, being driven onto the beach, November 23, 2020, where it was quickly scrapped. – Cruise & Maritime Voyages photo.*

## *Astor*

The sixth ship joining the doomed parade to Aliaga was the *Astor* (ex *Astor*, *Fyodor Dostoevskiy*), late of Cruise & Maritime Voyages until the company’s pandemic-induced demise in July 2020. The beautiful little 20,606-gt ship was built in 1987 as the second ship to bear the name, in an attempt to revive the liner service between England and South Africa. This *Astor* was ordered by Safmarine as a more powerful and slightly larger version of a very similar ship it operated briefly in 1984. Built by Howaldtswerke-Deutsch Werft at Kiel, Germany, the new ship was 578 feet in length with a beam of 74 feet and comfortably cruised with 590 passengers. Even before the maiden voyage from Hamburg on January 31, 1987, plans for line voyage service were dropped in favor of using it as a full-time cruise ship. That didn’t last long either and the nearly new ship was sold on October 3, 1988, to Soviet interests to be operated by the Black Sea Shipping Company as the renamed *Fyodor Dostoevskiy*. [Note: the name is sometimes transliterated to a couple other spellings.] Most of its career was spent under charter to various West German companies.

In 1995, its original name of *Astor* was restored, with ownership showing as Astor Shipping Company. The ship continued to cater to German passengers and found a loyal following. In 2010 it was sold to Premicon of Munich, Germany, under whose ownership it remained for four years. Over its career, the ship was most frequently chartered by Transocean Tours, becoming a mainstay of its fleet. The ship was bought by the Greek-owned Global Maritime Group in 2014 with both the ship and Transocean coming under the auspices of Cruise & Maritime Voyages. Both companies had good success in marketing the vessel. Had plans not changed, the *Astor* was to be renamed *Jules Verne* beginning in May 2021 for a French division of the Croisières Maritimes et Voyages brand. Instead, it was sold at auction for a scrap value of

only \$1,710,000 on October 15, 2020, following the bankruptcy. Beached at Aliaga on November 23, it was half gone by the end of the year.

With the Turkish scrapyards full, and with more ships nearby still awaiting their fate, the focus turned to the infamous beaches of Alang, India. Operators in the United States and E.U. countries preferred to have their ships recycled in the more environmentally acceptable conditions of Turkey. But there were ways around that, including selling cruise ships to third parties in the Middle East who would then resell them for scrap. As 2020 came to a close, this was just beginning to happen, with the first two beached by year’s end.



■ *Following a long career elsewhere, the Karnika spent its last year as a cruise ship in India. When Jalesh Cruises failed, it ended up on the breakers’ beach at Alang. – Photo courtesy of Peter Knego.*

## ***Karnika***

The *Karnika* (ex *Crown Princess*, *A’Rosa Blu*, *Aida Blu*, *Ocean Village Two*, *Pacific Jewel*) may have had a short history as India’s first large cruise ship, but it enjoyed a long and interesting career after first sailing for Princess Cruises, beginning in 1990 as the *Crown Princess* and subsequently for four other divisions within the Carnival Corporation. It cannot be overstated how important the construction of this ship was to revitalizing Italian shipbuilding, which had not seen a new ship built in nearly 25 years. A majority of the world’s cruise ships are now built in that Mediterranean country, but this was the one vessel that jumpstarted the industry after a long period of dormancy. The 70,310-gt ship was laid down as Yard Number 5839 at Fincantieri Cantieri Navali Italiani SpA, in Monfalcone, Italy. Originally ordered by Sitmar Cruises, construction began just one month before that famous company was absorbed by P&O for its Princess Cruises division. It was designed to carry 1,590 passengers based on double occupancy, with a maximum complement of 1,950. Its dimensions were: length, 804 feet; breadth, 106 feet;

and draft, 25 feet. Four powerful MAN-Burmeister & Wain, 8-cylinder diesel-electric engines drove twin screws propelling the ship at a cruising speed of 19.5 knots.

Early in the building process the shipyard brought in noted Italian architect Renzo Piano to add some Italian flair to the designs, giving the ship a unique profile and some avant-garde touches. Not all his ideas survived, but the most highly visible aspect did, which was incorporating a dolphin-like look to the forward structure and a single, stove-pipe funnel aft. The tip of the bow formed the nose, with the superstructure sloping up to a rounded, domed lounge set above the bridge, forming the head.

On May 25, 1989, the *Crown Princess* was floated out of its building dock. After an inaugural summer in Europe, the ship was christened in Brooklyn by Italian actress Sophia Loren. Over the years, *Crown Princess* served on nearly all variety of itineraries, remaining a vital member of the Princess fleet until spring 2002. That summer, it was transferred by P&O to its German A’Rosa Cruises division and renamed *A’Rosa Blu*. In 2004, that line was dismantled and the ship transferred again within the company to Aida Cruises, now controlled by Costa Cruises, and renamed *Aida Blu*. With bright red lips painted on the bow and enormous eyeballs on either side of the hull, the idea of a friendly dolphin was no longer the first impression. Still not fitting in, the ship went on to yet another P&O division in April 2007 for casual cruises marketed by Ocean Village as its second vessel, receiving the name *Ocean Village Two*. The ship spent most of 2009 with that line before it too was shut down and the ship moved once again, this time to P&O Australia as the *Pacific Jewel*. It was finally sold by Carnival Corporation in 2018 to Zen Cruises Pvt Ltd. and marketed under the Jalesh Cruises banner. Newly refurbished, it began sailing as the *Karnika* on April 17, 2019, with a cruise from Mumbai to Goa.

After a seemingly successful first year as India’s largest cruise ship, neither the company nor the ship would survive the COVID-19 crisis. The ship was anchored off the coast and abandoned, being placed in receivership. It made the short passage to the shores of Alang, India, beaching there in late November 2020. According to the last owners, the name of the ship came from the celestial nymph Aspara Karnika of Hindu mythology, who emerged from the ocean and was of “exquisite beauty and alluring charm.” Perhaps a fitting final name for a vessel that possessed those attributes.



■ *The Ocean Dream was retired by Peace Boat after eight years of operation. With all logos removed from the hull and funnel, it awaits its fate in Hiroshima Bay on October 28, 2020. – Photo by Akigi Kure.*



■ *The one-time Tropicale, the first new ship built for Carnival, on the beach at Alang as the Ocean Dream. – Photo courtesy of Vaja Nilesh.*

### ***Ocean Dream/Tropicale***

*Ocean Dream* (ex *Tropicale*, *Costa Tropicale*, *Pacific Star*) may have been the last cruise ship to arrive off the beach at Alang in 2020, but it was a significant ship of firsts in its previous career. As the *Tropicale*, it was the first newly constructed ship in the Carnival Cruise Lines fleet and the first major vessel in the 1980s to trigger the huge shipbuilding boom that continues unabated

to the present day. While it wasn't a perfect attempt, this cruise ship influenced many others that were to follow in its wake. Carnival's lead architect, Joe Farcus, designed the colorful interiors and, perhaps most notably, the red, white and blue winged funnel that has since become a symbol of the company. The new ship was under construction throughout 1981 at the Aalborg Vaerft yard in Aalborg, Denmark, as Yard Number 234. Considered a big ship for the time, it measured 36,674 gt, 672 feet long and 87 feet wide. Based on double occupancy, the passenger complement was 1,022 passengers. Its maiden voyage got underway from Miami on January 16, 1982, heading into the Western Caribbean for seven days.

This writer was a passenger on that inaugural trip, and it was less than a smooth entry into service. There was a missed port, poor-quality food and nonfunctioning toilets on three of its eight decks. Gradually those teething troubles smoothed out, and it became a notable ship first in the Caribbean and then the U.S. West Coast for weekly cruises to the Mexican Riviera from Los Angeles. It pioneered new itineraries for Carnival including its first cruises to Alaska, and it was often the ship selected to test the market for new embarkation ports.

The *Tropicale* remained with the company until 2000, by which time it had been outclassed by the considerably larger series of ships Carnival was building. It always remained a one-off ship, but its influence could be seen aboard its ever larger siblings. Transferred within the Carnival Corporation group of lines, it went to the Costa Cruises division, becoming the *Costa Tropicale*. The signature winged funnel gave way to a vertical stove-pipe design sporting the Costa logo, greatly altering, but not diminishing, its unique profile. It served with Costa from 2001 until 2005, when it was again transferred within the Carnival Corporation group to P&O Cruises Australia, where it was renamed *Pacific Star*.

Australia frequently has been the last stop before a P&O-affiliated ship leaves the company, and such was the case once again. In March 2008, in a somewhat unusual move, Carnival sold the *Pacific Star* to the Pullmantur Cruises division of rival Royal Caribbean Cruise Line. The ship received its fourth name, becoming *Ocean Dream*. After four years, it was long-term chartered in 2012 to the Japanese Peace Boat organization, remaining with them until early 2020. The intended replacement, *The Zenith* (ex *Zenith*), never entered service with Peace Boat, due to the global cessation of cruises. Sold for scrap, *Ocean Dream* arrived at its final port, Alang, India, on December 31, 2020, where the 38-year-old ship was expected to be broken up.

## Sitting in Limbo

The nine vessels detailed above all reached the breaker’s yards within the calendar year 2020. Unfortunately, many more are waiting in the wings. The eight ships highlighted below weren’t being actively scrapped in 2020, but for most, their fate in 2021 is all but certain.

### *Marella Celebration*

*Marella Celebration* (ex *Noordam*, *Thomson Celebration*) was one of the first vessels to be permanently withdrawn when the novel coronavirus pandemic first hit in April. By September 1, the obvious outcome was confirmed that the ship had been sold for scrap after being idle at Malta. Built in 1984 for the Holland America Line, the 33,933-gt ship was among the most popular in the fleet for Alaska, Mexico and Caribbean cruises. Carrying 1,254 passengers, this beautiful ship has a length of 704 feet and breadth of 89 feet. After its initial career, the ship joined its sister *Nieuw Amsterdam* (ex *Nieuw Amsterdam*, *Patriot*, later *Thomson Spirit*) in the Thomson Cruises fleet, carrying U.K. passengers under the new name of *Thomson Celebration*. Its name was changed again in 2017 to *Marella Celebration* as the Thomson operations came under the new banner of Marella. One interesting side note, during nearly all its active life, the former *Noordam* remained under the ownership of the Holland America Line and was leased on a long-term charter basis. Although it reached the respectable age of 36, its loss to the breakers will be deeply felt because it was such a comfortable, small-to-midsize ship and a premier vessel in its day. It’s currently awaiting its fate in a raft with two other cruise ships near Aliaga, Turkey.

### *Marella Dream*

Another of *Marella Celebration*’s fleet mates is there too. *Marella Dream* (ex *Homeric*, *Westerdam*, *Costa Europa*, *Thomson Dream*) had been operating for Thomson Cruises (later Marella) on a ten-year charter agreement since 2010, from Costa Cruises, with an option to buy. With the charter expired and nowhere to go, the ship was placed on the disposal list. It was built in 1986 as the final new vessel for the venerable Home Lines. Less than two years later, in April 1988, both the ship and the cruise line were purchased by Holland America Line. Unlike the earlier *Atlantic*, the Dutch line incorporated it into its own fleet as the *Westerdam*. One year later, amid a cruise line acquisition mania, Holland America was taken over by Carnival Cruise Lines. The incredibly beautiful 42,092-gt ship was stretched and enlarged to 54,763 gt, with an increase in the passenger complement to 1,506 double occupancy. This increased the length of the *Westerdam* to 798 feet with an overall beam of 98 feet. It served Holland America Line faithfully for many years, but in 2002 it was transferred within the group to the Costa division and renamed *Costa Europa*.

### *Horizon*

The third ship awaiting its fate in Turkey is the *Horizon* (ex *Horizon*, *Island Star*, *Pacific Dream*). The ship and its nearly identical sister *Zenith* shared similar career paths, although the ultimate fate of the latter remains very much a question mark. The *Horizon*, built in 1990, was the first newly constructed ship for Celebrity Cruises, an upscale offshoot of Chandris Cruises.

The *Zenith* would follow in 1992. Both ships were built in Germany by the Jos. L. Meyer (Meyer Werft) shipyard in Papenburg as Yard Numbers 619 and 620. Each ship is 681 feet in length with a 95-ft beam and tonnage of approximately 47,413 gt. As built, the ships were designed to carry 1,362 passengers double occupancy, although with all berths occupied the total increased to 1,798.

The ships were hugely popular, quickly making Celebrity Cruises into a respected brand. So popular in fact that the line was taken over by Royal Caribbean in 1997. The sisters continued sailing for Celebrity. Later, in a joint venture between Royal Caribbean and First Choice Holidays, a new line called Island Cruises was formed. Both ships were expected to be moved there, but ultimately it was only *Horizon*, which in late 2005 was renamed *Island Star*. By 2008, Royal Caribbean had pulled out of the partnership and taken its ship back. The previous year they had acquired Pullmantur, with the *Zenith* moving to the Spanish-based brand in 2007. The former *Horizon* would soon reunite with its sister, being renamed *Pacific Dream* in 2009, a name befitting its deployment to Mexico for cruises out of Acapulco. In 2010, the ship was brought back to Europe and regained its original name, *Horizon*. The next move within the Pullmantur group was to transfer the ship to a new French division called Croisières de France in April 2012. The *Zenith* would join it there in 2014, but by 2017 the decision had been made to cease CDF operations, and both ships returned to cruising for Pullmantur.

The *Horizon* ended its 30-year career based in Dubai, offering the first Pullmantur cruises in the Middle East. As for the *Zenith*, in 2019 it was announced that it would be leaving the company to move on to a new career with Peace Boat beginning in 2020, replacing that company's former vessel *Ocean Dream*, another Pullmantur Cruises ship, beginning in April. With the onset of the pandemic, it would never sail for them, leaving the future of that ship also in jeopardy. The two ships have shared most of their careers thus far and may have reached their last days together as well.





■ *One of the more bizarre proposals may have been little more than a front to sell a great ship for scrap. The Satoshi only bore that name for two months. The former Regal Princess is expected to join its Princess sister Crown Princess on the beach of Alang, India, in 2021. – Photo courtesy of Kolma8, CC BY-SA 4.0.*

## *Satoshi*

*Satoshi* (ex *Regal Princess*, *Pacific Dawn*) is another sad story of multiple plans gone awry. As 2020 began, it looked like a bright future was ahead for the former *Regal Princess* in a new career with Cruise & Maritime Voyages. The line had agreed to acquire the ship at the end of 2019 from P&O Australia with the intention of renaming it *Amy Johnson*, for the famed aviator, in keeping with its explorer-themed nomenclature. A pattern of purchasing unwanted ships from Carnival Corporation and revitalizing their careers had been well established. It would rejoin its former Princess Cruises fleet mate *Columbus*. But the purchaser became insolvent in July and the sale never was consummated. Instead, a company calling itself Ocean Builders purchased the ship in October with plans to permanently anchor the 70,588-gt vessel off the coast of Panama as the “Crypto [currency] Cruise Ship” and as a base for tech startup companies. The company renamed it *Satoshi*. A satoshi is the smallest unit of bitcoin and is named after the supposed founder Satoshi Nakamoto.

In an ill-advised scheme, or scam, cabins were then to be sold at auction, making this a residential ownership cruise ship; as few as 10 cabins were sold out of the 777 offered. The project proved to be short-lived, and by December 20 it was announced that the concept was dead. The owners claimed that they were unable to obtain insurance on the ship. The *Satoshi* was sold for scrap and is expected to eventually make its way to Alang, India, where it will end its days near its sister ship, *Karnika*, the former *Crown Princess*. Like that ship, the *Regal Princess* was ordered by Sitmar Cruises but completely built from scratch for Princess Cruises at the Fincantieri shipyard in Monfalcone, Italy.

These two ships restored the dominance of the art of Italian shipbuilding. Their unique styling was developed by famed Italian architect Renzo Piano, giving them the shape of a

dolphin, if in the form of a very large steel one. The *Regal Princess* was first christened in August 1991 by Margaret Thatcher in New York. The ship is 804 feet long and 105 feet wide and was originally designed to carry 1,590 passengers. It had a highly successful first career, sailing for Princess Cruises until 2007. It was then transferred to South Pacific cruises out of Australia as the *Pacific Dawn* for P&O. It was heavily promoted as Australia’s first SuperLiner. Had 2020 gone differently, it would now be sailing as the largest ship in the CMV fleet. Unless something radically changes, the ship will be scrapped in 2021 at Alang.

## ***Grand Celebration***

*Grand Celebration* (ex *Celebration*, *Grand Celebration*, *Costa Celebration*), which was operated by Carnival Cruise Lines followed by stints with its subsidiaries Ibero Cruceros and, briefly, Costa Cruises, finished its long career still retaining part of its original name under the auspices of Bahamas Paradise Cruise Line. The ship was built in 1987 as the last unit in a trio that included the *Holiday* and *Jubilee*. It was one of the two Swedish-built ships to emerge from the Kokums A/B yard in Malmo, where it was laid down as Yard Number 597. Its garish interiors were designed by architect Joe Farcus. The dimensions were 733 feet in length, with an overall beam of 93 feet. It carried 1,494 passengers based on double occupancy, with up to 1,896 at full capacity.

For 21 years this ship helped establish Carnival Cruise Lines as the powerhouse company that it became. But in 2008, the ship was moved to a Spanish subsidiary brand and renamed *Grand Celebration*. With the dissolving of Ibero Cruises in 2014, the ship was again transferred within the group, this time to Costa, and renamed *Costa Celebration*. Painted in the Costa colors, fully refurbished with schedules printed and cabins booked, it was abruptly withdrawn in November 2014 without sailing a voyage. The ship had been hastily chartered and later purchased by Celebration Cruise Line as a replacement for its fatally damaged *Bahamas Celebration* (ex *Prinsesse Ragnhild*). When it reentered service on February 3, 2015, it was once again under the name *Grand Celebration*, with the cruise line now rebranded as Bahamas Paradise Cruise Line.

The ship’s last deployments were two-night cruises to the Bahamas, which were cut short following the twin disasters of Hurricane Dorian in 2019 and the coronavirus pandemic of 2020. The 33-year-old ship left Freeport, Bahamas, on November 12, 2020, with a stop in Port Louis, Mauritius, on December 30. At that point, it finally lost the “Celebration” part of its name, having it shortened to simply *Grand* for the delivery voyage to its destruction. The 47,262-gt veteran was expected to arrive at Alang in January 2021, where its career will end.



■ *The fate of the 35-year-old Magellan is very much a question after it was sold at auction for only \$3.43 million in October 2020. Extensively refurbished, it could see future service with Seajets or be scrapyards bound. – Photo courtesy of Cruise & Maritime Voyages.*

## ***Magellan***

*Grand Celebration*'s near-sister ship *Magellan* (ex: *Holiday*, *Grand Holiday*) may face a similar fate, although its current status is uncertain. What is known is that the 46,052-gt, 1,252-passenger ship was sold at auction on October 1, 2020, bought by Greek ferry operator SeaJets, which obtained it at the bargain price of \$3.43 million. Since this was the sixth passenger ship the company purchased in 2020, it was assumed that it was building up a new cruise fleet to see further service. However, the end of 2020 found the *Magellan* at Duqm, Oman, reportedly with an armed guard aboard, adding to the mystery.

As for history, the ship was built in 1985 as the *Holiday*, Carnival's second newly constructed ship. Like its predecessor *Tropicale*, it was built by Aalborg Vaerft in Aalborg, Denmark, as Yard Number 246. A 25-year career with Carnival was followed by its transfer to its Ibero Cruceros division, where it began sailing on May 18, 2010, as the *Grand Holiday*. As that line ceased operations near the end of 2014, the ship was sold to Cruise & Maritime Voyages. After an extensive refit that radically transformed the ship's interiors, it was renamed *Magellan* and began sailing for its new owners on March 15, 2015. It proved to be a very popular ship. Sadly, as previously seen, the line went into receivership in July 2020. If its next stop after the Middle East proves to be India, it will mean all three remaining ex-Carnival ships from the 1980s will be at the scrapyards of Alang at the same time.



■ *The Marco Polo, in the colors of Orient Lines, anchored in the ice-filled bay of Cuverville Island, Antarctica, on January 15, 2006. – Photo by Shawn J. Dake.*

## ***Marco Polo***

Saving perhaps the saddest news for last, the beloved *Marco Polo* (ex *Aleksandr Pushkin*) has been sold for scrap. In form and function, this was one of the last remaining ships with the lines of a classic ocean liner. Its story is familiar to ship enthusiasts but bears a brief recounting. It was built in 1965 as the *Aleksandr Pushkin* for the Soviet Union’s Baltic Shipping Company by the East Germany-based Mathias-Thesen-Werft Wismar for transatlantic service between Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) and Montreal. It could also comfortably cruise with Western passengers in fairly basic, reasonably priced accommodations. On the Atlantic, it was designed to carry 130 first-class passengers and 620 in tourist class.

The *Aleksandr Pushkin* had a length of 578 feet, a beam of 77.4 feet and a draft of 27 feet. Powerful Sulzer diesels drove the twin-screw ship at 20.5 knots. After 1975, the ship was engaged mainly in cruising. Quite often through its later career it operated under charters, at various times catering to British or German passengers. In 1991, the ship was sold to a group that would revive an old name for a new cruise line – Orient Lines. Given an amazing rebuilding that would completely transform the interior and add notable structural changes to the exterior, after over two years the liner would reemerge as the 22,080-gt cruise ship *Marco Polo*. Looking sparkling new with a deep blue hull, its eight passenger decks could accommodate up to 826 passengers. It possessed that certain something that only a few ships have, which quickly brought it a loyal following. In 1998, the company was bought by Norwegian Cruise Lines, which retained the Orient Lines name. Like some of its other acquisitions, the operation wasn’t a good fit with the NCL brand and, effective March 23, 2008, the ship was sold, and Orient Lines ceased to exist. The buyer was the Greek operator Global Maritime Group. For nearly two years, the ship would operate under charter for the German Transocean Tours fleet.

But at the beginning of January 2010, another new phase of a fabulously successful career would begin under the banner of Cruise & Maritime Voyages. For over a decade, the ship remained popular with its British passengers and ship fans from all over the world who wanted to experience this delightful, well-run relic of the age of graceful sea travel. The unfortunate conditions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic brought all cruise ship operations to a halt,

including that of the venerable *Marco Polo*. For much of 2020, the ship remained laid up at Avonmouth, the port and suburb of Bristol, England. Cruise & Maritime Voyages succumbed to the financial woes of not being able to generate revenue and went into administration, the equivalent of bankruptcy, on July 20. The *Marco Polo* was sold at auction on October 22, with the ship fetching only \$2,770,000 as scrap. It sailed empty on a last voyage via the Middle East. Entering its 56th year, the *Marco Polo* arrived off the beaches of Alang, India, reaching that final destination on January 9, 2021.

## To Sum It All Up

If 2019 proved to be the best year ever for the cruise industry, 2020 was by far the worst in the entire history of passenger shipping. No disaster ever hit the entire industry like the COVID-19 novel coronavirus pandemic, which brought worldwide shipping to a halt. “Unprecedented” is too mild a word, but the only one that can be applied to the year we all went through. Few ships attempted to resume service, and those that did were met with wildly varied success or failure. Despite overly optimistic hopes, for most the year 2020 had to be completely written off. In something almost resembling normal times, a large number of new cruise ships were delivered to owners that could not fill them with passengers or give them anywhere to go. Even more ships are contracted for delivery in 2021, including some of the largest in the world. Many of those will undoubtedly be delayed, which may cause the biggest cruise operators in the world to rethink the wisdom of building such large, high-density ships, although they’re in too deep to abruptly change course now. Also, there’s the very real concern over what passengers will be looking for in their cruise vacations going into the future. As always, and in very unexpected ways, it was a fascinating year for passenger shipping, even if very few ships were actually operating.

My hope is that one of the best ways to understand and keep track of these developments comes from reading this annual column. This is the 20th year for *Cruise Ships: The Year in Review*. Shorter versions of this annual look at the cruise industry go back even further. As you can imagine from how long it took to read, a piece of this magnitude takes a whole lot more time to write. As cruise shipping has grown astronomically over the past several decades, so has this coverage. For those who have been loyal readers, I thank you profusely for your dedication and support. I cannot close this story without giving special thanks to, and for, my friends who have supplied invaluable help and information all through the years and especially in the very trying times of 2020. Each of you know what you mean to me, but thank yous to Gordon Ghareeb, Peter Knego and Kevin Anthony. Also, thank you to my wife Caroline Dake, who puts up with so many hours away from me while I’m researching this story and tapping out the 25,000 or so words on the keyboard year after year.

Maybe someday we’ll all be able to return to the sea and ships that we have loved so much. Some old favorites will be gone, it’s true, but new generations will be there to take their place in passenger hearts and eventually in shipping history. As always, I close by wishing you a very Happy New Year and Happy Cruising.



## About the Author

SSHSA member Shawn Dake *has spent most of his adult life around passenger ships. He was a tour guide aboard the Queen Mary in Long Beach and took his first cruise aboard P&O's SS Arcadia. He founded Oceans Away Cruises & Travel, a travel agency that was active for 36 years in Long Beach. He's a freelance photojournalist and a lecturer aboard cruise ships. He was co-founder and past president of the Southern California Chapter of SSHSA.*