



Back to the future

By Vittorio Garroni, Garroni Design

Cruise operators are anxious to resume services and welcome guests back, but they must overcome several hurdles as they navigate the right route to recovery

Cruise ships are returning to the sea as the industry slowly moves closer to normality. Of course, the industry will not be the same as 2019 – a ‘normal’ year that now seems like a dream – but we will see a new normal emerge that will take us into the future.

Although we are all anxiously looking forward to a future that is still full of uncertainties, the cruise sector cannot afford to remain inactive any longer after putting significant human resources and capital at stake to meet the demands of

a constantly evolving market. However, it must contend with some critical issues when resuming operations.

Many people are still largely isolating themselves – both due to regulatory imposition and fear of the ongoing pandemic. Consequently, they still are unwilling to take public transport unless strictly necessary, particularly for long-distance journeys. In addition, transport services that have been paralysed by the pandemic need a profound and economically sustainable reorganisation. Similarly, there is a need for a technical

overhaul of systems and equipment that have been inactive for too long, especially in the aviation sector.

Choosing the right route to recovery is a delicate task. Current guidelines advise people against long-distance air travel and related tourism, including staying on busy or remote holiday resorts. Consequently, the only reassuring alternatives are individual trips or proximity cruises that take guests to nearby destinations, reducing the risks and inconvenience of transfers. For now, exotic destinations remain a privilege for



Garroni Design has created a concept cruise ship for Lake Geneva in Switzerland



There are no size restrictions for vessels cruising on lakes, which means they can feature catamaran hulls and masts for quieter and more eco-friendly sailing

the adventurous few who are comfortable relying on the expertise of niche operators to keep them safe.

Reopening the global cruise industry will also provide investment opportunities for investors and backers, particularly in comparison to land-based hotel resorts, which tend to only be of local importance. The most prestigious holiday resorts are located in beautiful, but fragile and remote places that are difficult to reach or leave if necessary. These resorts occupy large areas and irreversibly alter the natural environment. And, however beautiful and well equipped, they become monotonous for guests because they are static and offer limited activities.

Cruise ships, on the other hand, are equipped with advanced technical equipment to help reduce their impact

on the environment, so they achieve maximum operational and energy efficiency. In addition, they have more recreational options than land-based resorts, and they are less impacted by seasonality, which means the industry is able to amortise costs more effectively.

Although it is a conservative choice that recalls the humble beginnings of cruise industry, proximity travel has many advantages. Not only is it reassuring for travellers who wish to minimise their use of public transport, but it is also reliable for operators who can more easily manage logistics for ships sailing in safe domestic waters. For guests on proximity cruises, the ship becomes like a second home – it is comfortable, always close by and provides a worry-free environment for them to rediscover the value of familiar places that are

sometimes forgotten and undervalued because they are too close to home.

Lakes provide an unexplored opportunity for proximity cruises, particularly in places like Central Europe where operators have the chance to sail eco-friendly itineraries that last more than a week. They offer an interesting alternative to river cruises because there are no limits on the width and heights of the vessels. Hence, operators can use stable catamarans with a low draft that can be powered by ultra-modern technological sails assisted by silent electric thrusters that activate paddle wheels. Consequently, cruise vessels designed for operating on lakes are much more efficient than river ships. **CFR**

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