

The Telegraph

The last thing the cruise industry needs is armchair warriors and their tired stereotypes

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Cruising has borne the brunt of the coronavirus pandemic in multiple ways, partly due to misconceptions that the nature of cruising somehow made it more susceptible. But the last thing the industry needs is armchair warriors churning out well-worn tropes about Petri dishes.

Recently, I've seen countless so-called travel experts (most with no knowledge of cruising) air laughable assertions – that the cruise industry is doomed (wrong) and that cruise ships are dirty (they're not). Let's remember that Diamond Princess, the cruise industry's first casualty, was struck down because passengers unknowingly brought the virus onboard, not because of cleanliness issues. Back then, far less was known about the virus, and how to stop its spread. It was unprecedented.

It's frustrating that, when the global travel industry is clearly in dire straits, some are intent on tearing down the cruise sector, fuelling misconceptions as publicly as possible. Take travel blogger Johnny Jet's Tweet to 124,000 followers: "I don't think any sane person is going on a cruise for at least a year." The barrage of responses from cruisers professing their insanity proved that the vast majority can't wait to set sail.

I think it's high time we shattered some cruise stereotypes. First, the perception that we're unadventurous types, happiest when following flag-waving guides en masse – something I've never done. This May, I was due to sail around Alaska with Holland America. I was taking my husband – the first time I've taken him (or anyone) on a cruise. Not because I don't like him – simply because I love travelling solo. My most memorable trips include adventures in Togo, North Korea and the Faroes. None of the latter were cruises, but I still love setting sail as much as the next cruise fanatic.

Standout solo cruises include my Caribbean sailing on Silver Spirit. I learned how to enjoy doing nothing, spending hours on my balcony watching islands drift by, dragging myself away only to take part in the daily mini-golf tournaments. And Hurtigruten's Northern Lights-spotting cruise. When the famous lights put in an appearance an alarm would sound, prompting a mad scramble to the top deck. There were several nights when I stayed there long after everyone else had gone back to bed, sprawled on a sun lounger in my sub-zero gear, marvelling at the starriest sky I'd ever seen. On MSC

Cruises' MSC Meraviglia I signed up for wine tasting classes and potted around Spanish cities like Cartagena, discovering tiny, flower-filled alleyways and cafés far from the main drags.

Comments from friends, or left beneath articles I've written, remind me that many don't realise how dramatically cruising has evolved. On Silversea's Silver Spirit, several passengers asked if I was crew (I happened to be one of the youngest passengers onboard). It proved that even the keenest cruisers can cling to stereotypes, unaware of the industry's diversity – proof of which are my favourite sailings: an eight-person catamaran around Sri Lanka, a Med cruise on Princess Cruises' hi-tech Sky Princess and a luxurious Caribbean cruise with Silversea. Was it strange having a butler serve my tea every morning? Yes, but I quickly adapted.

Another myth? That we're sedentary creatures. I'm a former snowboard instructor (I spend one month of every winter on the slopes) and love mountain biking – laps around a promenade deck are my idea of hell. Luckily, Royal Caribbean's FlowRider surf simulator is merely the tip of the iceberg. Norwegian Cruise Lines passengers can join neon-drenched spin classes, three Carnival ships – Horizon, Panorama and Vista – have a pedal-powered SkyRide so you can bike around the ship, high above the deck and Crystal Cruises' Crystal Esprit has a retractable, water sports marina. Scenic River Cruises, Emerald Waterways and AmaWaterways are just three of a growing number of river cruise lines to carry fleets of bikes on board. It's easier than ever to offset onboard indulgences once you're on dry land. Which leads me to food.

Yes, I was once elbowed aside, on P&O Cruises' Britannia, by a sugar-rushing teenage cruiser clamouring for the last doughnut, although in her defence, they were amazing doughnuts. But cruise ship buffets simply aren't the burger-heavy battlefields people imagine. I recently discovered my favourite, Princess Cruises' beautiful World Fresh Marketplace, on Sky Princess. And I'd definitely elbow someone aside to get to its dim sum bar.

It's also untrue that fine dining requires hefty supplements. There's never been more variety for those who don't want to pay extra. Take Seishin, a Japanese fine dining restaurant on Silversea's Silver Spirit. I love Japanese cuisine, and dined there (at no extra cost) daily during my cruise. And I'm particularly excited about Windstar Cruises. Soon, Star Breeze passengers will be able to dine (at no extra cost) at Cuadro 44 by Anthony Sasso restaurants. Previously head chef at NYC's Casa Mono, Sasso was credited with helping the restaurant retain its Michelin star for 10 years.

Entertainment has been overhauled, too, proof of which is MSC Cruises' Cirque du Soleil shows, and Holland America's fantastic nightspots – cruise line scouts trawled America's best jazz joints to find musicians for its legendary Rolling Stone Rock Room bars.

Another myth? That we're only allowed glimpses of destinations before being herded back onboard. Several lines now offer overnight stops. G Adventures takes this to the extreme, allowing expedition ship passengers to sleep on a chunk of Antarctic ice, and passengers on Holland America's Land+Sea Journeys can overnight at McKinley Chalet Resort, near Denali National Park.

So please, ditch the stereotypes (and negativity), and consider cruising. Quarantined at home, grounded for longer than I've ever been, I'd give anything to sit on a cabin balcony, watching one destination fade away and another slide into view.

I've even persuaded my parents to do one – no mean feat considering that they once bought into the very stereotypes they'll soon shatter. They're well-travelled and annoyingly fit: they spend half the year in France hiking up mountains, their last trip was to a West Papua dive lodge, and they recently drove from Paris to Beijing. I suspect they'll choose an expedition-style ship – and that's okay. The ocean's a big place, with room for all of us.