



Cruise Lines Focus on Sustaining the Future of Coral Reefs

By Catharine Hamm

Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) members are working on innovative and ambitious ways to sustain and grow coral reefs, key marine habitats that are among the most diverse ecosystems on the planet, and extremely vulnerable to warming ocean temperatures. CLIA places environmental sustainability among its top priorities, including the health of the oceans.

CLIA member cruise lines are taking a leading role as an energizing force for change, partnering with marine science organizations and universities in coral reef restoration initiatives. Member lines are also focused on public engagement and helping guests understand the need to preserve and sustain coral reefs.

These are among the ambitious cruise line-sponsored projects underway.

MSC Cruises is involved in the preservation and growth of coral species through the MSC Foundation's "Super Coral Reefs Programme," which is playing an important role in revitalizing coral populations, including the critically endangered elkhorn and staghorn corals. Among projects, MSC is supporting the growth of coral trees. Once they reach a certain level of growth, the coral trees are transplanted into MSC's offshore nursery of Ocean Cay, MSC's private Bahamas island, and eventually to coral reefs. Under development is a scalable model that MSC hopes will aid coral reef restoration worldwide. Partners include Bahamian and international scientists, universities, and conservation organizations, with research shared in scientific publications. In 2025, MSC opened a Marine Conservation Centre on Ocean Cay, its private island in the Bahamas. The facility includes 22 coral tanks used for growth and scientific study by marine scientists and students. Cruise guests have the opportunity to visit the center to gain a greater understanding of the importance of healthy coral.

Royal Caribbean Group has joined with the Inter Miami CF soccer team and the University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric, and Earth Science to support the school's citizen science program, Rescue a Reef, in South Florida. The triad focuses on bringing back the growth of marine invertebrates in more than 1,000 coral colonies off Miami. Royal Caribbean Group also underwrites coral restoration work with the Marine Resilience & Sustainability

Center (MARES), dedicated to restoring the biodiversity of the Caribbean Sea. The center's work has included the rehabilitation and repair of nearly 50 acres of delicate marine ecosystems. In addition, Royal Caribbean has placed "reef balls," also known as "bay balls" – which mimic natural reefs as habitats for marine life – near Perfect Day at CocoCay, the cruise line's private island in the Bahamas. These balls, weighing some 1,750 pounds, help create a home for coral and sustain its growth.

Disney Cruise Line plays a key role in coral reef restoration through the Disney Conservation Fund (DCF), which supports the Coral Reef Foundation, the world's largest non-profit focused on restoring coral reefs. Disney's work has blossomed from its initial efforts in planting a few thousand corals in Florida's Coral Reef to a program that now numbers in the tens of thousands of corals. The cruise company has also helped create a Pillar Coral Recovery Project focused on growing and preserving Pillar corals, a somewhat rare species that the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries describes as cigar-like clusters growing upward. In addition, DCF has also supported work in coral genetics, and education efforts including "Coral Reefs and You," a student education program, which educates on the importance of coral reefs, including on local economies, and stresses the need for conservation efforts.

Windstar Cruises is involved in coral reef restoration through a partnership with Coral Gardeners, an organization based in French Polynesia's Moorea, part of the Windward Islands, about 11 miles northwest of Tahiti. The organization's goal is to restore reefs through "innovative coral farming and transplantation." The program began on Windstar's 312-passenger Star Breeze in 2022, with Windstar adopting 1,000 corals and encouraging guests cruising Tahiti to do the same for a \$35 per person donation. Since then, Windstar has encouraged guests on any itinerary to adopt a coral, which they can gift to friends or family. More than 3,500 corals have been adopted. A goal of the line is a dedicated coral nursery. Windstar also takes interested guests in French Polynesia on an excursion to see what Coral Gardeners does. They are introduced to staff who educate them about growing coral and steps taken towards restoring reefs.

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