



Wellness at Sea

By Susan B. Barnes

Wellness tourism has grown faster than any other special interest segment of travel for more than a decade, with an upward trajectory that is expected to continue. Cruise lines have taken notice, focusing onboard programs and cruises on health, wellness, and self-care.

Lynne McNeas, president of the International SPA Association, says that savvy travelers expect to see a spa in their hotel, and now more than ever they are taking advantage of wellness options on their cruise ships as well.

“Cruise passengers often see their voyage as a chance to reset and may identify wellness and self-care as a goal for their trip,” says McNeas. “It takes a dedicated space—like the onboard spa—to truly deliver on that intention, providing professional, holistic services that renew mind, body and spirit.”

Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) members are at the forefront in the wellness space.

Innovative Technologies

A trio of industry firsts set sail in 2025, all using technology to enhance guests’ wellness experiences. On the mat, the first immersive yoga practice at sea debuted onboard Oceania Cruises’ new Oceania Allura. Guests do the downward dog with a backdrop of virtual landscapes ranging from tropical islands to tranquil forests.

Debuting in the fitness center on Silversea Cruises ships is *amp*, a strength training system with an intelligent app integration that guides users through more than 500 exercises and provides real-time feedback – think of it as an AI-powered trainer to help keep health routines on track while at sea. Also new, golfers onboard Silver Dawn can up their game with SeaDrivePro by Off the Deck, the world’s first fully portable golf entertainment system where guests can virtually play iconic courses with real-time analytics.

Play (Pickle) Ball

Pickleball has taken the world, and sea, by storm – the sport has surged more than 300% over the past three, according to Pickleheads, an online platform for fans. Holland America Line was named the exclusive Official Cruise Line of the Professional Pickleball Association in 2022 and quickly outfitted all its ships with refreshed pickleball courts. Ships in the fleets of lines such as Carnival Cruise Line, Celebrity Cruises, Crystal Cruises, MSC Cruises, Norwegian Cruise Line,

Princess Cruises, Regent Seven Seas Cruises, and Royal Caribbean are outfitted with courts, and they are coming too to select Silversea ships. On the rivers, AmaWaterways was the first river cruise line to offer pickleball.

Thermal Suites

Cruise lines are going all-in on their thermal suites, elevated, limited-occupancy areas with facilities such as whirlpools, saunas, experience showers, and steam rooms. A first-at-sea is Norwegian Cruise Line's addition of a circulation-boosting clay sauna, which compliments other wellness spaces onboard *Norwegian Aqua* and *Norwegian Luna*, which launched in Spring 2026. Explora Journeys, which recently partnered with tennis champion Jannik Sinner to serve as its global ambassador and co-create exclusive onboard wellness rituals, already enhances its spas with hydrotherapy pools, salt caves, and ice falls. Celebrity's new *Celebrity Xcel* features the line's first-ever Hydra Room, a warm, bubbling pool with massaging jets and heated lounge chairs.

Local focus

In addition to wellness programs inspired by the latest technology and wellness advancements, cruise spas also draw inspiration from the destinations that ships visit. For example, on the Paul Gauguin based in Tahiti, guests can enjoy a Volcanic Stone Massage while cruising past the volcanic islands of the South Pacific. On Celebrity ships, guests can book coconut-infused treatments in the Caribbean and Asian therapies in the Far East.

Wellness Themed Cruises

AmaWaterways, Windstar Cruises and Crystal Cruises are among lines introducing new sailings specifically focused on wellness. Cunard embarks on its first Wellness at Sea voyage in July 2026 – onboard the Queen Anne, in partnership with *Harper's Bazaar* experts, and featuring Olympic silver medalist Katarina Johnson-Thompson. For yoga fans, river line Uniworld's sailings on India's Ganges feature an onboard yogi leading an exclusive wellness program, with twice-daily yoga and meditation practices, healthy cooking demonstrations, and daily wellness talks.

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