

COVER FOCUS / OCEAN CRUISE UPDATE

The 2021 Booking Picture

TRAVEL ADVISORS SAY SOME CLIENTS ARE OPTING FOR U.S. CRUISES THIS YEAR, WITH BOOKINGS PICKING UP FOR 2022 AND LATER

By Theresa Norton

After being buffeted by the ups and downs of the pandemic, there is still positive news for the cruise industry. Travel advisors contacted in mid to late August said they are still booking cruises.

“The cruises being booked right now fall into two main categories – clients only sailing with cruise lines they have built up a trust in as past guests or clients booking that once-in-a-lifetime cruise or destination they have always wanted to do,” said Lucinda Belden, a Dream Vacations franchise owner in Carrollton, Texas.

Alan Rosenbaum, of Dream Vacations in Johns Creek, Ga., said his clients are hesitant

to navigate overseas health protocols. “People are staying close to home and sailing from ports in the U.S.,” he said.

1 LOOKING AHEAD

Liz Dominguez, a Dream Vacations franchise owner in Fernandina Beach, Fla., said many clients are booking 2022 departures.

“My Alaska bookings and interest have been steady for the 2022 season sailing on luxury and premium cruise lines in addition to custom land vacations exploring the Alaskan interior,” she said. “After Alaska, bookings have been steady for Northern Europe cruises followed by Caribbean cruises. Caribbean all-



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— Valerie Dorsey,
Charmed Vacations



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Dream Vacations

inclusive resort vacations, specifically in Cancun and the Riviera Maya, account for the last bits of my sales this year and into 2022.”

2 THE DELTA VARIANT

Agents had differing takes on whether the Delta variant is slowing cruise sales. “June was busy with bookings through the summer of next year,” Rosenbaum said. “But July and August have slowed down. I am not sure if the slowdown now is due to the Delta variant, or if the pent-up demand initially caused a rush to book earlier in the summer.”

Valeric Dorsey of Charmed Vacations, a Cruise Planners franchise in Royal Palm Beach, Fla., said she had two

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3 THE FLORIDA FACTOR

Dominguez said most of her bookings are for 2022 or later. “I’ve only had a handful of bookings for close-in 2021 departures since cruising restarted, regardless of the embarkation port,” she said.

“The rise of the Delta variant cases and the situation we have in Florida with those cases is keeping 2021 very soft for my clientele, though they feel confident about 2022.”

Belden is actively urging clients to book now in order to secure attractive rates. “I strongly encourage cruisers or soon-to-be cruisers to book their cruise now at the best rate possible – even 2023,” she said.

“The protection being offered on your booking is very comprehensive with cruise lines.”



HIGH PRAISE FOR THE CRUISE INDUSTRY

→ Liz Dominguez, a Dream Vacations franchise owner in Florida, expressed pride in the cruise industry and also supports vaccine requirements.

“My first clients to set sail from a U.S. port once cruising resumed had nothing but high marks to give to the experience. I am certain I will

continue to hear the same as others depart and return. These solid return-to-service experiences, and the fact that most cruisers are very loyal to their vacations at sea, make me hopeful that the industry will recover. It will not be immediate, but I think we will get there in the next couple years,” she said.

“A condition told to me by clients making every close-in booking is that the requirement for vaccines has been a deciding factor in their feeling comfortable to finally travel again. COVID-19 vaccines being a permanent requirement for cruising would be welcome to many, including me.”