

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Cunard goes all in for transformative travel experiences

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Cunard's grand Queen Mary 2 cruise liner, a byword in old-world charm mixed with contemporary comforts. Image courtesy of Cunard

By DIANNA DILWORTH

Stately cruise line Cunard has unveiled tailored Special Event Voyages to satisfy the cravings of affluent consumers who seek more experiential travel away from the distractions of daily life and rigor.

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The cruises will be curated to create thematic experiences with speakers, activities and workshops on fields of study such as fashion, literature, history and outer space. Each of these experiences will feature on weeklong cruises aboard Cunard's flagship ocean liner, Queen Mary 2.

"Entertainment, fashion and formal nights and fine dining are an integral part of the Cunard experience," said Josh Leibowitz, senior vice president of Cunard North America. "Special event voyages such as Transatlantic Fashion Week, the Festival of Food & Wine and Transatlantic Music Week perfectly match Cunard's unique sense of occasion while enriching the iconic transatlantic experience.

"Returning programs such as World Space Week and London Theatre at Sea with the Olivier Awards were received positively and continue to meaningfully engage our guests," he said.

"First-time programs such as the Literature Festival at Sea are developed according to emerging trends, partnerships and guest feedback. Ultimately, Cunard aims to develop programs that create Transformative Travel' experiences for guests through a variety of topics."

Aside from Queen Mary 2, **Cunard** has equally stately cruise liners in Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth.



On board the Queen Mary 2. Image courtesy of Cunard.

Out at sea

Cunard has been running specially curated voyages since 2015, with many of the special event voyages taking place during Queen Mary 2's iconic transatlantic crossings.

The first event voyage of the new season will be the London Theatre at Sea with the Olivier Awards May 13-20.

In partnership with the Olivier Awards, award-winning actors talk about their careers on the crossing. The experiential ride will also include dance classes, choirs and design workshops.

The Transatlantic Fashion Week takes place May 24-31. Fashion company Badgley Mischka will launch its 2021 resort collection in an exclusive runway show during the voyage.

The designers will also give talks on their business experience while on board.

In June, the Festival of Food & Wine will feature Michelin-starred chef Michel Roux Jr.'s French restaurant, Le Gavroche. Guests will be able to dine on special meals, observe cooking demonstrations and hear the chef in a Q&A.

"At sea, passengers are afforded an intimate experience with celebrities and notables that are a rarity on land," Mr. Leibowitz said. "Intimate Q&As, book signings, detailed workshops, curated food and dining options and more are once-in-a-lifetime events that create only on Cunard' experiences.

"Many are firsts, such as Michelin-starred chef Michel Roux Jr., who will bring his French cuisine to sea or Badgley Mischka who will debut their 2021 resort collection onboard," he said.

"As many of the special event voyages take place during a seven-night transatlantic crossing, guests can enjoy seven uninterrupted days at sea pursuing casual interests or passions that they wouldn't have the luxury of time to do at home."



The library on board the Queen Mary 2. Image courtesy of Cunard.

Crossovers

Cunard can rightly claim to be a heritage brand, making transatlantic crossings between Southampton and New York

since 1847.

The British company's latest efforts shows how it seeks to innovate as much as draw upon its legacy as competition in the luxury cruise sector intensifies with bigger and more lavishly appointed ships and extravagant onboard offerings.

The cruise line's special event, Transatlantic Crossings, are designed as an antidote to this era's over-connected lifestyle and fast-paced realities of home life. The idea is to give guests a space to explore their creative passions and casual interests during seven uninterrupted days at sea.

"Pursuing in one's overall curiosities while onboard is a modern way to make travel meaningful," Mr. Leibowitz said.

"Every special event voyage and related programming aims to offer returning or new guests consistently evolving programming that immerses and engages them while pushing the boundaries of curating timeless experiences," he said.

Guests on Cunard ships are experienced and affluent travelers who typically average around 60 years of age.

That said, Cunard sees the most varying demographic on Queen Mary 2 for a transatlantic crossing, where the common denominator among guests is enjoying glamorous ocean travel.

The programs are designed to appeal to first-time cruisers and potential guests as much as veteran Cunarders, as the company calls them.

"Cunard caters to guests who expect a high level of service and thought-provoking programs," Mr. Leibowitz said.

"The special event programming allows guests to be as involved as they wish. Cunard's special event voyages and their programming is part of the cost of sailing onboard."

Bit of this and bit of that

Program timing is key.

For example, the Journey of Genealogy with Ancestry on Aug. 14-21 will mark the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower voyage to what is now the United States. Guests will be invited to learn about their own ancestry from the experts at Ancestry.com, and can listen to talks about the historic Mayflower voyage.

The Greatest Generations Foundation Voyage in August will honor the heroes of World War II, commemorating the 75th anniversary of the end of the 1939-45 war between the Allies and Axis powers.

The Big Band Ball is for dance lovers who enjoy music of the big bands of the 1930s and '40s. The cruise will include a 17-piece orchestra, accompanied by vocalists.

The Anthony Inglis and The National Symphony Orchestra will conduct the United Kingdom's National Symphony Orchestra on a special crossing in September.

In October, during World Space Week, guests can sit in on talks from experts about astronomy, astrophysics, aerospace and astronautics.

During Transatlantic Music Week in October musicians will similarly woo guests.

At the Literature Festival at Sea in December 1-8, award-winning authors Ian Rankin, Kate Mosse, Alexander McCall Smith and Prue Leith will hold readings and do book signings.

"Cunard creates special event programming by speaking to industry leaders across various topics and collaborating with our partners," Mr. Leibowitz said.

"Additionally, Cunard continually seeks feedback from guests on what they think of current and past experiences, while testing new ideas with current and future guests onboard," he said.

Transatlantic crossings aboard Cunard's Queen Mary 2