

Canada's Travel Trade News

travelweek

March 16, 2023

**WAVE 2023 IS
OFF THE CHARTS**

Page 3

**THE PROS AND
CONS OF CHATGPT**

Page 6

**WESTJET-SUNWING
DEAL GETS GO-AHEAD**

Page 9



**BIG
WAVE**

Surprising statistics and the latest booking trends as cruise industry's Wave season exceeds all expectations

By Kathryn Follitt

TORONTO — After years of pandemic restrictions, followed by unprecedented pent-up demand, a successful Wave season this year was never in doubt.

But even for seasoned travel advisors - not to mention the cruise lines - the sheer volume of bookings coming in during the last weeks of 2022 and the first months of 2023 has truly blown all expectations right out of the water.

Travel agents say they've never seen anything like it. From multiple bookings for World Cruises, to budget-be-damned longer durations and high-end stateroom categories, clients are embracing the 'revenge travel' trend, and then some.

Caroline Hay, GM Cruise Division, Trevello Travel Group, says this Wave season has been a record-breaker for Trevello, with a double-digit growth rate that has well surpassed 2019 sales figures.

Trevello member agencies have been adept at maximizing the pent-up demand, says Hay. Group bookings continue to thrive too. Trevello's tools and training for members include everything from weekly cruise training sessions, to access to a cruise-focused community of Trevello members.

She says the host agency's cruise booking metrics show a consistent increase in longer sailings and higher category bookings, boosted by promotional offerings, a growing trend among travellers to explore new destinations in superior accommodations, and a recent surge in clients who are making sure they use their vacation time - or have more time available to dedicate to travel due to retirement. "Looking ahead,



ROYAL CARIBBEAN'S NEW WONDER OF THE SEAS

our projections indicate that these trends are continuing into 2025 which is great news all around," Hay tells Travelweek.

Feedback from cruise lines on this year's Wave season shows just how far the cruise industry has come from the dark days of 2020 and 2021. Here's a look...

SILVERSEA

One of the most telling indicators of Wave 2023's success comes courtesy of Silversea.

The luxury cruise line now has almost 15% more on the books for 2023, than it ended up with for the entire year of 2022. "February 2023 was the biggest month booking-wise in the history of the company," Mark Conroy, Silversea's, Managing Director, The Americas, tells Travelweek.

And here's more good news: "We are taking record sales calls, [and] also handling them," says Conroy. "With a few exceptions, our phone hold times are less than 90 seconds and abandonment rates are running less than 2%."

Conroy adds that Silversea also has a record number of travel advisors using its online booking tool, reachable

through Silversea's travel agent portal.

Conroy has a bonus tidbit for Canadian agents: Silversea continues to have great success selling in Canadian dollars at a good exchange rate for guests.

CELEBRITY CRUISES

Caribbean sailings are leading the pack for Celebrity Cruises' Wave 2023, but Europe is close behind, says Allan Brooks, Celebrity's National Director, Market Sales - Canada.

"Wave has been amazing! We are seeing growth well over our 2019 numbers," Brooks tells Travelweek. "Caribbean is off the charts. Both seven night and longer have been most popular. Europe is also picking up momentum. We think now that air pricing is becoming normalized, our guests feel more comfortable booking."

Brooks says Wave 2023 will match and surpass previous years. And that's not just the case for Celebrity. Brooks is hearing success stories from the cruise line's agent partners too. "In speaking to our travel partners, they too are seeing 'best ever' results this year. Our travel partners have remained engaged and they are now starting to see the fruits of their labours."