

INSIDE VIEW:

CONSISTENCY, CHANGE AND P&O'NESS

**A conversation with P&O Cruises
Managing Director Carol Marlow**

by

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Carol Marlow is in the unique position of having headed two of world's most historic passenger ship companies. In 2009, Carol Marlow was appointed Managing Director of P&O Cruises. Prior to that, she was the Managing Director of Cunard Line. I began by asking her how the two lines differed.

"P&O Cruises and Cunard are the two iconic, historic lines of the cruise industry."

"P&O Cruises was the original cruise line, which can trace its roots back to 1837. The company, then called The Peninsular Steam Navigation Company won the contract to carry the mail for the British Admiralty to the Iberian Peninsula and then all points east, as far as Australia. Cunard line was formed in 1839 and won the Admiralty contract to carry the mail west to Canada and America. Both companies started carrying passengers relatively early on. Both companies have had over 200 ships in their time, and have fascinating stories to tell of their years of service, both in peacetime and in war".

"Nowadays, P&O Cruises caters for largely

British passengers, with all elements of the cruise tailored to suit those who like our British ways - albeit now British tastes are much more cosmopolitan than they used to be. Voted 'Britain's Favourite Cruise Line' for the third year running this year, we have seven quality cruise ships ranging in size from 710 passengers to 3100 passengers, with differing facilities depending on whether they are exclusively for adults (2 ships) or Family Friendly (5 ships). They all mainly cruise out of Southampton England, into the Med, up to the Fjords and into Baltic, as well as longer cruises over to the Caribbean and ultimately around the world. There is some winter cruising in the Caribbean, home-ported in Barbados, and also now some autumn Med cruising, open jaw cruises from Civitavecchia to Athens, Barcelona to Savona etc."

"People who travel on P&O Cruises tend to feel as though they are 'coming home' every time they travel with us. They feel very comfortable and at ease, and families have great fun, although they also enjoy dressing up for formal evenings now and then. They

often remark on the friendly crew and visible officers. We hope we offer a holiday of a lifetime on a ship (not a floating resort!) every time."

"Cunard, on the other hand, has 3 grand ocean liners [i.e., Queen Mary 2, Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth - - debuting in October], offering signature transatlantic crossings, voyages out of Southampton, New York, the West Coast of America, and world cruises. It hosts a very international passenger list - probably the most international at sea, all brought together by a cultural like-mindedness. Their experience is filled with elegance and grandeur, and is akin to attending a series of very grand events, with several formal receptions and dinners during a voyage. This type of voyage attracts celebrities, and those that enjoy meeting celebrities from all spheres of life. Cunard's white gloved service is first class."

"So, both very special experiences, but quite different."

Ms. Marlow has taken control of P&O during a time of significant change and with change come challenges. "As the company has been at the forefront of British cruising for so long, I feel very honoured to be able to take it forward for the next few years. I see my role as one of leading and inspiring our large team as we grow further. We have just added Azura to the fleet, and have Adonia joining us next year,"

"With 7 ships, we must make sure we continue to offer that unique 'P&Oness' on all 7 ships consistently, even though our ships are of differing sizes, with differing facilities. I travel on our ships often, encouraging and acknowledging excellent service from our crew, and making sure that we all know the direction in which we are headed. We need to stay very much in tune with our passengers' needs, and so I meet and chat with them regularly, and we look to innovate and evolve their experience with every new cruise. My aim is for P&O Cruises to continue as Britain's Favourite Cruise Line' for many years to come!"

This will be no simple task as P&O faces more competition than in recent memory. The UK cruise market is growing rapidly. In 2009, a period of harsh economic conditions, British passengers took more than 1.5 million cruises and some within the industry have predicted that this figure will eventually double. Approximately 40 percent of these cruise sales were on ships of the Carnival UK brands of which P&O is one. However, the other major cruise lines have noticed this growth as well and are deploying more and more ships to the UK. These are not just ships making occasional calls in British ports but large ships such as Independence of the Seas and Celebrity Eclipse which are sailing regularly from Southampton and which are being marketed primarily to the British public.



Carol Marlow (Photo courtesy of P&O Cruises)

Nonetheless, Ms. Marlow believes that P&O is positioned to meet the competition.

"At P&O Cruises we put all our long experience into creating memorable holidays for our passengers, with the highest emphasis on service, quality and choice."

"We are conveniently home-ported in Southampton, England for our British customers, with all our seven ships sailing from Southampton. When two of our ships undertake some winter Caribbean fly cruising, they have convenient regional flight departures from around the UK. We offer the British cruiser the greatest amount of choice tailored to their needs, with more departures, more ports of call, more choice of ships and more holiday durations suited to them than any other line."

"Our recent research shows us that our passengers particularly love the way we tailor everything to their British needs; the way we actually celebrate being on a ship, with the officers and crew making this a real nautical experience, as only we can due to our long heritage. They also love the way that a cruise with us is a special occasion that they will remember for a long time



Azura (Photo courtesy of P&O Cruises)

to come."

"And of course, this is the 'P&O'ness' that they will experience whichever of our fleet of seven modern and stylish ships they travel on - from small and elegant, Adonia, exclusively for adults, to vast, fun and family friendly superliner Ventura."

Even though cruise lines from other countries are actively courting the British market, P&O has no plans to retaliate by enlarging its overseas marketing. Indeed, to become more international would be to jeopardize one of the company's core strengths.

"P&O Cruises is committed to the pleasing the UK market and we will always be first and foremost British, with ships designed specifically for the British market and the vast majority of our passengers British, or those that like the British way. However, as marketing and media goes global we welcome passengers from outside the UK. We have a special relationship with Australia, which we can trace right back to the early 1900s, and so we welcome Australians on board for our world cruises, and we also enjoy some American passengers joining us for our long cruises - mostly anglophiles!"

A growing fleet

In the last two years, the P&O fleet has expanded dramatically with the addition of two 116,000 gross ton mega-cruise ships each capable of carrying more than 3,000 passengers. The first of these, Ventura, entered service in April 2008. Ms. Marlow has just overseen the entry of the second ship

"Our newest superliner, Azura, blends all the much-loved P&O Cruises traditions with the exciting modern luxuries and innovations of a contemporary ship. She offers the classic service, quality and entertainment associated with cruising at its best."

"Azura's atmosphere is stylish, sophisticated and serene and every element of life on board is delivered with a meticulous attention to detail."

"She offers the ultimate in relaxation and pampering, featuring The Retreat - an adult only haven offering alfresco massages and sumptuous loungers."

"The choice of dining on board Azura is really exceptional, with everything from Indian fine dining to bistro style fare accompanied by vintage wines served

by the glass."

"For entertainment there is: dancing in the Atrium; live music in Manhattan; drinks in Brodie's (our traditional London pub named after one of our co-founders); and mesmerising shows, of two very different kinds, in The Planet Bar and The Playhouse."

"And of course we also have SeaScreen, a huge cinema screen over the Aqua Pool, delivering a rather special cinematic experience, day and night"

"There really is something for everyone on board and we have already had fantastic feedback from passengers, who are particularly enjoying the style, décor, traditional touches and comforts of the ship."

While there is a P&O style of cruising that runs throughout the fleet, traditionally each of the ships in the P&O fleet has had her own distinct character. Moreover, recognizing that the British market is composed of different people with different tastes, there are different nuances to the P&O experience on the different ships, e.g., some are family-friendly while some are exclusively for adults; some have a three-tiered dress code and others two. In keeping with this approach even though Azura and Ventura are based upon the same design, Azura is not a mere clone of Ventura.

"Azura and Ventura are the largest sister ships in our fleet. However, their decor and facilities differ, with Azura offering a more classic style of cruise, plus innovations such as The Retreat and SeaScreen. Ventura, on the other hand offers 'Cirque Ventura' entertainment, bungee trampolining and a rock school for the children, and a pool under a magradome for the swimmers."

"Both ships offer fine dining at its best, with Ventura featuring the extremely successful partnership with Marco Pierre White, authentic Spanish tapas in Ramblas and Asian fusion delights in East."

"Azura's Seventeen restaurant offers fine dining P&O Cruise's style and an innovative Indian menu in Sindhu, in conjunction with Michelin starred-chef Atul Kochhar. Azura also has the perfect venue for wine-lovers, with The Glasshouse, with vintages served by the glass and chosen by British wine guru OllySmith."

At the same time, P&O has sought to harmonize its new large ships with the rest of the fleet.

"The beauty of larger ships is that you have the space to be inventive, whether that means having a space dedicated to weddings and renewal of vows - as with the Ivory Suite - or a room catering solely for games enthusiasts, like Game On, the Wii room on board Azura. There is enough space to create different holiday experiences for every kind of passenger."

"Both ships offer the same 'P&O'ness', though, that our passengers experience whichever of our modern and stylish ships they sail on. This is the atmosphere cre-

ated by our officers and crew, and is unique to our ships, whichever you choose."

Azura and Ventura are the fulfilment of one of P&O's long-held goal. In 1998, P&O brought out the Grand Princess for its then-subsiary Princess Cruises. This was the largest ship of that time and its innovative style was an immediate hit with the public and over the years some eight more ships have been built based on this design for Princess. P&O also wanted to build some Grand-class ships for its own fleet but circumstances never permitted. Indeed, it went so far as to order a larger version of the original Grand class design (sometimes referred to as a "Super-Grand" class ship) but it was determined that Princess needed that ship in order to meet market demand. (She is now Caribbean Princess).

With Azura and Ventura, P&O finally obtained the Super Grand-class ships it desired for so long. While this design is now very much associated with Princess, Azura and Ventura are not the Princess product with a British accent.

"Whilst Princess Cruises is a brand within Carnival UK, the P&O Cruises ships have a very different look and feel. It felt natural to incorporate some of the very successful Princess features onto Azura and Ventura but we feel we have done so in classic British style. Our cruises are designed with the British passenger in mind, we know what they like to eat, to see, how they like to be entertained, and this is different from an American style. Officers are also more visible, and there is a heightened sense of formality on Azura, with her more classic style of cruise."

The addition of the Azura is not the only change to the P&O fleet. In 2011, the 45,000 gross ton Artemis, will be leaving P&O. Artemis was originally ordered by P&O for its Princess subsidiary and sailed as Royal Princess from 1984 to 2005 at which time she came to P&O as Artemis. This was an innovative ship - - one of the first to have ocean views from all of the cabins. She is used for longer cruises and has a loyal following. However, last year P&O received an offer to buy the now 26 year-old ship from MS Artania Shipping. The new owner plans to charter the ship to the German tour operator Phoenix Reisen.

"Whilst it had not been our intention to sell Artemis so soon, we received a commercially attractive offer for the ship. As our capacity was already due to grow with the introduction of Azura, we decided to accept the offer."

However, this does not mean the end of small ship sailing at P&O - - the current Royal Princess is coming to P&O, and will take the traditional P&O name Adonia. "Adonia will join the P&O Cruises fleet in May 2011 just after Artemis leaves the fleet, and whilst she

will not be an exact replacement for Artemis, she will offer a similar small ship experience exclusively for adults. "

"Adonia is considerably smaller than Artemis and will enable us to offer a more diverse collection of cruise holidays, to more off the-beaten-track destinations. Adonia will be our pathfinder ship and will offer a truly intimate and traditional cruise experience."

The new Adonia is a jewel of a ship. She began life in 2001 as R8, one of eight essentially identical ships built for Renaissance Cruises. When that line went bankrupt the eight ships were purchased by other cruise lines and now form the backbones of the ultra-luxury cruising lines Oceana and Azamara Club Cruises. P&O, however, does not plan to market the ship in that way. Rather, P&O guests will be able to enjoy these luxurious surroundings but with the familiar style of a P&O cruise.

"Adonia will compliment the rest of our P&O Cruises fleet perfectly and will not be sold or marketed any differently to the other ships in our fleet."

"Adonia will celebrate all those things our regular passengers love about cruising with us - a classic dance floor, Crow's Nest observation lounge, formal nights, classical music recitals, guest speakers, silver service dining and a dedicated card room."

"She is traditionally furnished with wood paneling, leather armchairs and fine artwork, library with over 4,000 titles and staterooms with Egyptian cotton linen and more than 75% with their own private balcony".