

HOW TO SELL VIKING LONGSHIPS

Agents well versed in selling these sleek river vessels detail whom to target - and how

BY JEANNINE WILLIAMSON

With a 60-strong fleet, Viking River Cruises is the largest company in the river industry and shows no sign of slowing its expansion. The company also enjoys a high level of recognition among American consumers, thanks to an aggressive TV advertising campaign with stunning photography.

In what's become an annual multiple-ship christening ceremony, Viking named six new Longships earlier this month and now operates 46 of these nearly identical vessels.

Although the term "longship" is a slight misnomer (all European river vessels are restricted to a maximum length of 443 feet), the 190-passenger vessels are virtual clones, reflecting the sleek Scandinavian style and unfussy décor favored by Torstein Hagen, Viking's Norwegian founder.

So how do agents sell Viking to consumers, especially when many of its ships are virtually the same? We asked a group of agents from the U.S. who took a Christmas market-themed fam trip on the Viking Kara on the Rhine River last December.

"The many Longships allow consistency across most of the fleet, which helps during low- or high-water operational

continued on page 30

JUST THE FACTS

CRUISE LINE: Viking River Cruises

SHIP: Viking Kara

SIZE: 190 passengers, 443 feet long

ONBOARD FEATURES: 95 outside cabins (two Explorer Suites, seven Veranda Suites, 39 Veranda Staterooms, 22 French Balcony Staterooms, 25 Standard Staterooms); indoor/outdoor Aquavit Terrace; Sun Deck with walking track, putting green and herb garden; restaurant and lounge bar with floor-to-ceiling panoramic windows; elevator from middle to upper deck; free Wi-Fi

ITINERARY: Seven-night "Rhine Getaway" between Amsterdam and Basel to Kinderdijk, Cologne, Koblenz, Rudesheim, Heidelberg, Speyer, Strasbourg and Breisach

PRICE: From \$2,156 per person, double occupancy

COMMISSION: 12 percent commission, with higher rates for consortia, and no NCFs

CONTACT: 877-668-4546, www.vikingcruises.com



A veranda stateroom on a Viking Longship.

ShoreTrips

Shore Excursions, City Tours
& Day Activities

GOLD
TRAVVY
2016

TRAVEL WEEKLY
MAGELLAN
2016

WE'VE GOT THE BEST OF THE BALTIC

ShoreTrips.com 888-355-0220

Outdoor views on the Aquavit Terrace.



issues,” says Tom Munholland of Reunions at Sea in Jacksonville, Fla., referring to times ships can’t cross under a bridge or sail past a certain point due to high or low water levels, and passengers are transferred from one ship to another to continue their voyage. “However, there is a certain percentage of clients who don’t like the cookie-cutter approach to their vacation, and would prefer the individuality of the ships that Uniworld offers, for example,” he says.

Tammy McDaniel of Tammy’s Journeys in Fort Walton Beach, Fla., says some clients like the familiarity of the same ship layout. “For many clients the itinerary is most important, followed by the ship,” she says. “I think it helps that clients know what to expect when they travel and don’t have to worry about getting used to a new ship if they cruise with Viking again.”

Even with such a large fleet, balcony and French balcony cabins sell out quickly and it would be useful for Viking to provide agents with a priority heads-up on openings and cancellations so existing clients can be upgraded, says McDaniel.

Agents agree that Viking’s extensive marketing campaign, including corporate sponsorship of the hugely popular “Downton Abbey” on PBS, has driven consumer awareness of river cruises. “People come in saying they want to go on a Viking cruise and don’t realize there are other lines out there, so if need be I will



G-NORMOUS

MARCH



North America’s biggest agent incentive rolls into March. Enter today for your chance to win up to \$1,500 in weekly cash prizes.

1 877 390 9050
gadventures.com/g-normous

G Adventures

talk this through with them,” says Dawn Moseley of Orlando-based Cruise Vacation Outlet. “That said, Viking offers excellent value for money and this makes it an ideal choice for clients who are looking for a new experience.”

Aimed at the English-speaking market, the majority of Viking river passengers are 55-plus, and daily excursions vary in pace from gentle walks through historic towns and villages next to mooring spots to motorcoach excursions followed by more strenuous tours around medieval castles. Unlike some other lines, Viking ships don’t carry a fleet of bikes, nor offer a swimming pool or spa.

The overall opinion of agents is that these extras are not important to price-conscious clients and those seeking an immersive culture-rich cruise, although they would recommend lines such as Tauck, AmaWaterways and Uniworld for guests seeking a more upscale experience with fewer fellow passengers.

Cruising and sightseeing on Viking Kara are interspersed with onboard talks and demonstrations. Mealtimes start with an expansive breakfast buffet, with specialty items served by wait staff, followed by served lunch and dinner with soft drinks, beer and wine included.

“For the price of the fares, Viking does extremely

well, and the food and service are excellent,” says Andy Bailey, of Luxury Travel Institute in Gainesville, Fla. “Nothing feels rushed, and I like the pace of the cruise, yet there is a very good frequency of shore excursions and optional tours.”

Debbie Madden, a cruise specialist with CWT Vacations in Little Rock, Ark., adds: “Other lines do not have as many ships as Viking and this really helps when it comes to booking, as you can offer clients more availability and a choice of itineraries that is not always possible with other companies. If clients have been cruising on ocean ships for years and I feel they are ready for something new, then I recommend river cruising. Offers such as Viking’s air promotions are always attractive.”

But, as always, qualifying is key. “It is especially important to pre-qualify a client for river cruises,” Munholland says. “If they are expecting a certain level of service or specific amenities that aren’t included, there is a risk of not meeting the client’s expectations. Viking is ideal for first-time river cruisers, as well as first-time cruisers who have never ocean-cruised before. It offers a great product, with value-priced packages that provide convenience for agents and clients.”

“I think it helps that clients know what to expect when they travel and don’t have to worry about getting used to a new ship if they cruise with Viking again.”

– Tammy McDaniel,
Tammy’s Journeys



Cuba

Sail into History

Book now and get up to
\$100 shipboard credit*

7 Days. 3 Ports. 1 Unforgettable Journey.

Fathom handles all the details, and makes it easy for you to become one of the first travelers to cruise between the US and Cuba in over 50 years.

Experience the sights & sounds of Cuba, while enjoying fantastic accommodations and delicious food aboard the *Adonia*.

Don't miss out on this unbeatable value. Reserve your place today - call Fathom customer service at 1.855.932.8466 or contact your travel professional.



*Shipboard credits vary by cabin category and are applicable to 1st and 2nd person in the stateroom and are only valid on Fathom cruises to Cuba. Combinable with FIT and Group Rates. Not combinable with GAP amenities. Promotion is subject to availability. Promotion ends April 30, 2016. Gratuities are not included. Taxes, fees and port expenses not included.

©2016 Fathom Travel Ltd. Fathom™ and the Fathom logos are trademarks of Fathom Travel Ltd. All rights reserved. Ship's registry: Bermuda.