

Charting a Course

Small-ship cruises provide a powerful environment for team building. BY HOLLY RIDDLE

Sustainability, authenticity, wellness — they're all popular talking points for today's travelers but not just in the leisure sphere. Business travelers likewise exhibit similar values while on the go, and when it comes to hosting company retreats or incentive trips, small-ship charter cruises tick all the right boxes.

"We've seen a 12 percent increase in charter and incentive bookings since 2019. Demand is strong from a mix of groups, including corporate groups," said Amy Conover, director, Charter & Incentive Sales, Windstar Cruises. "Today's clients want more than logistics. They're asking for immersive experiences, strong sustainability credentials and curated cultural programming, all of which align well with Windstar's offerings."

AmaWaterways similarly noted steady growth in group travel, including for executive retreats and incentive programs, with industries such as technology, finance and pharmaceuticals particularly drawn to the brand's river cruises.

While it is entirely possible to find cultural immersion itineraries and plenteous wellness offerings for corporate groups on large or mega cruise ships, smaller ships stand out by providing naturally intimate settings. For example, Variety Cruises' ships are intentionally small, holding up to 72 guests with an approximate 1:2 crew-to-guest ratio. AdventureSmith's ships average 40 passengers worldwide. Expedition micro cruise specialist Secret Atlas's ships carry between 12 and 42 guests.

Michele D'Agostino, co-founder, Secret Atlas, explained, "We're seeing ... companies moving away from large ships toward smaller, more intimate vessels. In the past, many corporate groups ended up on big ships where it was easy to feel like just another face in the crowd. Now, there's a growing desire for more authentic, personal experiences where people can truly connect."

Often, those more authentic, personal experiences are supremely one-of-a-kind, in some cases life-changing or bucket-list activities, from swimming with rare wildlife to trekking across the Arctic. No wonder an increasing number of corporate groups are coming to understand just why AdventureSmith founder and president Todd Smith called the small ship a crucible for



Making Connections: AmaWaterways excursion (above), and Windstar water activities (left)

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corporate goals, and D'Agostino described the small expedition ship experience as a powerful basis for team building.

As Filippou Venetopoulos, CEO, Variety Cruises, summed up, "These aren't just 'reward trips.' They're curated experiences that foster collaboration, learning and long-lasting bonds."