

TTG Top 50 Travel Agencies 2024 assessment form: Top Cruise Agency category

Congratulations on being shortlisted as one of the top cruise agencies in the UK & Ireland! The next stage is for one of our journalists, and a supplier partner, to interview you on Zoom in January/February 2024 to find out how you and your team have evolved over the last 12 months, and how you've provided the very best care to your customers.

New for 2024, we will be asking questions in a more standardised fashion, to make it quicker and simpler for you to answer the questions, to help us compare finalists more systematically, and to help us to give finalists more constructive feedback and to allow us to generate interesting (non-specific!) insight into how the best travel agencies in the country are running their businesses. Please don't worry if you're not doing everything on the list in this assessment form... there are plenty of ways to wow us.

It is very helpful, but not mandatory, for you to fill the form in and send it to us before your interview so we have more time for informal chat during the call. Your answers should refer to **calendar year 2023**, but do share what you've been up to in the first few weeks of 2024 as well!

SECTION A: ABOUT YOUR AGENCY:

1. Agency name:

2. When and how established?

3. Tell us about the sort of holidays you sell?

| | Rough % of your 2023 sales? | Did sales of this holiday type grow or shrink in 2023 for you? | Top 3 suppliers you use for this sector/holiday style? |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Ocean cruise | | | |
| River cruise | | | |
| Escorted touring | | | |
| Adventure tours /active breaks | | | |
| City breaks | | | |
| Beach holidays | | | |
| Weddings & Honeymoons | | | |
| Ski & snow | | | |
| Corporate travel | | | |

5. Please share details about your team.....

Number of staff total:

Number of sales consultants:

Range of roles:

Range of experience in travel:

SECTION B: CUSTOMER SERVICE [10 marks available]

1. Please tell us, for each of the following customer service procedures and tasks, whether you and your team were able to do this for all of your cruise customers in 2023, for most of them, for some of them, or for none of them? Don't worry if you're not doing some of these things at all; there are other ways to wow us!

| | All customers | Most customers | Some customers | None |
|--|---------------|----------------|----------------|------|
| Pre-departure phone call | | | | |
| Submit API information | | | | |
| Pre-book flight seats | | | | |
| Do online check-in | | | | |
| Pre-book dining options | | | | |
| Pre-book tours, attractions or experiences | | | | |
| Pre-book car hire, airport lounges, airport hotels etc | | | | |
| Send additional pre-departure information about the destination etc | | | | |
| Give a complimentary add-on such as a lounge pass or priority check-in | | | | |
| Arrange for special touches in clients' hotel room or cabin | | | | |
| Contact the client on arrival/boarding | | | | |
| Welcome home call | | | | |
| Welcome home gifts/hamper etc | | | | |
| Reward loyal/ high-spending customers with incentives, special events or gifts of any kind (and tell us below what?) | | | | |
| Send a special gift for wedding/ honeymoon bookers | | | | |

2. Do you have a loyalty programme of any kind, to reward repeat bookers? Yes/No
Please tell us how it works?

3. Are you using any of the following platforms? If so, what is your current rating, and please share a link to the page?

- Trustpilot [Yes/No]
- Feefo [Yes/No]
- Google Reviews [Yes/No]
- Facebook Reviews [Yes/No]
- Any other platform/system? Please give detail:
- Not using a review platform currently

4. Can you share 2 examples of ways your team demonstrated your expertise and connections in 2023 to organise something bespoke/exclusive, or something unexpected to surprise and delight your cruise clients?

5. Can you share 2 examples of when your team had to demonstrate their dedication and resourcefulness in 2023 to solve a problem/crisis for a cruise client, and saved the day?

6. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about how you looked after your clients and made them feel special last year? Anything new or unusual that you tried in 2023?

Judges will refer to the following guidelines when scoring this section:

0-2: Very limited information/evidence/examples

2-4: Offering standard customer service to most customers; not measuring customer satisfaction

4-6: Offering above-average customer service to most customers

6-8: Offering excellent customer service to the majority of customers; strong customer feedback scores

9-10: Offering extraordinary level of service to every customer; outstanding customer feedback scores

SECTION C: MARKETING & TECHNOLOGY [5 marks available]

1. How many of the cruise customers who booked with you in 2023 were repeat bookers?

2. How much of your 2023 cruise revenue came from NEW clients?

3. Which one of the following channels would you say was MOST responsible for any new cruise business you gained in 2023?

- Social media
- Word of mouth or referrals
- In-person events/shows
- Print or digital advertising
- Other [what?]

4. For each of the following social media platforms, please tell us a bit about if and how you are using them... Don't worry if you're not using some of these; you won't be penalised!

| | Facebook | LinkedIn | Instagram | Twitter/X | TikTok | Snapchat |
|---|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|--------|----------|
| Did you actively posted deals or other content on this channel in 2023? [Y/N] | | | | | | |
| How many followers do you have on this channel? | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Can you directly attribute sales to this channel in the last 12 months? [Y/N] | | | | | | |
| Have you paid to boost any posts on this channel in the last 12 months? [Y/N] | | | | | | |
| How much total did you spend on social media marketing in 2023? | | | | | | |

5. Can you share any particularly successful social media posts/content/campaigns from calendar year 2023, and their results? Results could be clicks, likes, enquiries, email sign-ups, shares, bookings etc. Share links or screengrabs here if possible.

6. Anything else you'd like to share with us about how you're using social media successfully to promote cruise?

7. Are you using any technology platforms? Please tell us which provider?

Booking platform?

CRM/customer database software?

GDS?

Email platform eg Mailchimp?

Social media publishing/analysis platform?

Quote-building/itinerary-building software?

Any others?

Do you have a website and is it bookable?

8. Did you invest in developing your website or in any other tech platforms in 2023? [Yes/no]

How much?/what?

What can you tell us about the impact/success those developments made?

9. How many customers are in your cruise email database?

By how much have you grown that in the last 12 months, and how?

How responsive is your database?

10. Did you invest in any print advertising, flyers, print brochures etc in 2023 to promote cruise? [Yes/No]

How much and have you been able to track the ROI?

11. Did you hold any in-person client events in 2023 eg supplier evenings or travel shows to promote cruise?

[Yes/no]

If yes, how many enquiries/sales can you attribute to each one?

Anything else you'd like to share about how you made these successful?

12. Did you organised any virtual client events/webinars etc in 2023 to promote cruise? [Yes/no]

How many enquiries/sales can you attribute to each one?

13. Do you have a formal referral programme to reward cruise customers who refer you? Yes/No

Please tell us how it works?

14. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us about your cruise marketing in 2023 - how you won new clients, and how you enhanced your agency profile? Have you done anything fresh to kick off 2024?

Judges will consider the following guidelines when scoring this section:

0-1: Very limited information/evidence/examples

2: Some examples of different marketing approaches

3: Good range of marketing approaches but limited strategy or evidence of ROI

4: Comprehensive marketing mix and measuring success of some channels/approaches

5: Creativity and innovation; excellent examples of how time and money has been invested to best effect and measured

SECTION D: YOUR TEAM & WORKPLACE [5 marks available]

1. Do you currently offer your team additional incentives alongside salary and commission?

If yes, what rewards/incentives do you offer?

2. Do you currently have one or more apprentices? [Yes/No]

3. Did you offer work experience to any students in 2023? [Yes/no]

4. Did you offer any additional workplace support/benefits in 2023 such as increased flexible working, wellness initiatives, mental health support?

5. Do you measure employee satisfaction through an employee survey of any kind? [Yes/no]

Can you share some recent/2023 results?

6. Which online training courses did your team undertake in 2023 to boost their product knowledge?

7. Which supplier training events (online or in person) did your team attend in 2023?

8. How many fam trips/ship visits/personal discovery trips did you team take in 2023?

9. Separate to supplier online training/supplier training events, did you offer your team any other development opportunities such as sales training, social media/marketing skills, management training, personal development, in 2023? [Yes/no]

If yes, please share details

10. Did anybody leave your agency in 2023 and why? Don't worry; you're not going to lose points!

11. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about how you've provided a supportive and inclusive working environment for your team?

Judges will consider the following guidelines when scoring this section:

0-1: Very limited information/evidence/examples

2: A modest amount of product training but few workplace initiatives

3: Good level of product training and some nice workplace initiatives

4: Strategic approach to product training; really investing in the team

5: *Very comprehensive approach to staff welfare/rewards/development/training; measuring satisfaction/responding to needs; considering the next generation/diversity and inclusion*

SECTION E: SUSTAINABILITY & FAIRER TRAVEL [worth up to 5 marks]

1. Has anyone on your team undertaken any training relating to sustainable travel in the last year, such as online training course, TTG's Sustainable Travel Ambassadors programme, supplier webinars about sustainability?

Yes/no

Please share details:

2. Are you proactively trying to support/recommend cruise lines who are taking sustainability more seriously?

Yes/No

Can you share some examples?

3. Do you share a list of tips with every client on how to be a responsible traveller? Yes/no

4. Have you shared messages about sustainable travel in your marketing at all in the last 12 months? Yes/no

Can you share examples?

5. How interested would you say clients are in sustainable travel and being a responsible traveller? Very / A little /

Not at all

6. Would you like more information from your supplier partners about what they're doing on sustainability?

Yes/no

7. Did you raise any money for charity in 2023? Yes/no

How much?

For which charities and how?

8. Have you supported your local community in any other ways in the last 12 months, such as volunteering, community events etc? Yes/no

Please share details

9. Anything else you can share about how you've been trying to play your part in a greener, fairer travel industry?

Judges will consider the following guidelines when scoring this section:

0-1: Very limited information/evidence/examples

2: Some understanding of/interest in sustainability but not implementing any measures

3: One or two examples of trying to support more sustainable suppliers/guide clients accordingly

4: A modest amount of training/learning; good examples of supporting more sustainable suppliers; doing some nice things in the local community

5: Dedicating significant time to learning/training; proactively supporting more sustainable suppliers and communicating with customers about responsible travel; improving the agency's own business operations; playing a significant role in the local community

SECTION F: BUSINESS PERFORMANCE [worth up to 5 marks]

1. What was your total cruise sales revenue in each of the following calendar years?

2019:

2021:

2022:

2023:

What sales target will you set for 2024?

2. What was your average selling price/booking value in calendar year 2023?:

And in 2022?:

3. What average margin were you working on in 2023?:

And in 2022?:

4. Do you have any particularly impressive bookings in 2023 (or early 2024) that you'd like to tell us about?

5. Is there anything else you'd like to share about the financial performance of your agency, or to put the above figures into context for us?

Judges will consider the following guidelines when scoring this section:

0-1: Very limited information/no figures

2: Revenue steady from 2022 to 2023

3: Modest revenue growth YOY; modest margin growth

4: Strong revenue growth YOY, good turnover per FTE consultant

5: Impressive turnover per FTE consultant; strong margin; growth in revenue and margin.

SECTION G: Final thoughts

Is there anything else you've been working on or that you're particularly proud of for 2023 or early 2024 that you'd like to share with us, or to help us understand the context of your answers?