

Cruise & Ferry

THE GLOBAL GUIDE TO PASSENGER SHIPPING

REVIEW

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BOUNCING BACK

Cruise industry leaders outline what they think is required for the sector to rebound after the pandemic



RESILIENCE

Royal Caribbean's Richard Fain on the future of cruising



SAFE SEAS

Heike Deggim discusses IMO's ferry safety initiatives

Staying safe

Simon Johnson asks five executives about the benefits of travelling via ferries and finds out what new measures their companies have introduced to protect passengers and crew against Covid-19

Previously in *CFR*, our ferry executives told us how the industry was embracing technology, making significant investments in R&D and innovation, lessening its environmental impact and excelling in customer experience. The ferry sector has proven itself to be extremely resilient and this groundwork will no doubt pay dividends in helping it bounce back faster from this crippling pandemic ahead of other travel modes. Built on the foundations of a socially distanced service for the communities we serve, there is an opportunity to capitalise on the desire of people to travel again. Personally, I will not hesitate to travel safely by sea.

Why is ferry travel so well positioned for a faster recovery than other forms of overseas travel?

DB: Air travel is the primary alternative to ferry travel, and the advantages of the latter during a pandemic are immediately clear. The physical dimensions of a Marine Atlantic ship allow for social distancing far beyond what an airline can offer – passengers can get outside in the open air or isolate in their own cabin. Plus, they can wait in their vehicles at ferry terminals and they don't have to collect their luggage from crowded baggage halls like they would at an airport.

FC: Ferries enable customers to travel safely and social distance during

their journey, thanks to fresh air circulating throughout the vessels and the outer decks. There is also less need for interaction and indoor spaces when checking in and departing from terminals, making the experience more relaxed and socially distanced.

JC: Data suggests that people are looking to travel domestically or take short trips to nearby countries because they want to be able to get home quickly if necessary and Brittany Ferries does just that. Our ports are located outside of major cities, but within easy access to smaller tourist destinations, which is ideal for people who want to holiday in a beautiful place without huge crowds.

MK: Ferries often provide a vital transport link between islands and the mainland, so their services are key to daily life and the economy. Jadrolinija will be pivotal in helping Croatia recover swiftly from the effects of the pandemic. In addition, we've seen that tourists feel much safer vacationing on islands because they're quiet.

WR: We have diverse types of customers and a solid domestic fan base who are keen to escape the lockdown and reconnect with family and friends or explore their own backyard. Our three-hour journey takes our guests through our capital harbour, the Cook Strait and the Marlborough Sounds. We've learned from experience that the domestic market is the first to recover

The host:



SIMON JOHNSON
Director of Shipshape Consulting

The panel:



DON BARNES
Vice president of customer experience at Marine Atlantic



FRAN COLLINS
CEO of Red Funnel Ferries



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Director of customer experience, product and onboard sales at Brittany Ferries



MLADEN KOTUROVIĆ
Executive director of general affairs at Jadrolinija



WALTER RUSHBROOK
Executive general manager at Interislander



Marine Atlantic's ferries are gradually resuming service in eastern Canada

in an economic downturn. For example, Interislander had a good year during the 2008 global financial crisis.

What has your company done to inspire passenger confidence?

DB: Since early March, we've been communicating with employees and customers about the changes in operating processes, health and safety protocols, and service adjustments through multiple channels. It's more important than ever that our customers see that we're delivering on these promises and I'm proud to say that their feedback has been positive.

FC: Safety and clear customer communication are our top priorities. We therefore highlight our procedures and their correlation with customer safety throughout our business on a daily basis. This allowed us to react quickly as the Covid-19 situation developed and introduce new procedures to keep customers safe.

JC: We've launched a new 'Together and protected' campaign, which outlines

the 12 health and safety measures Brittany Ferries has implemented on top of those required by law in the countries we sail to. Some of these measures include operating ships at 50 per cent capacity, mandating masks, staggering embarkation and disembarkation, using virucidal cleaning products, circulating fresh air across the ferries, and encouraging customers to book cabins to reduce onboard interactions.

MK: We're strictly adhering to all prescribed protection measures. We made sure to define all the necessary procedures in time so we could efficiently protect each passenger and crew member. It's challenging to impose new rules but still offer an enjoyable experience, but our sales staff and ship crew play a key role in achieving this.

WR: Safety is the first thing we think about each day, and it's absolutely essential to delivering a great customer experience. We're the original ferry operator in the Cook Strait, with more than 50 years of experience. Our rapid

response and hygiene process resulted in us remaining Covid-19 free, while enabling essential travel.

How will you adapt your marketing messaging to broaden your appeal?

DB: We're in the early stages of reopening in eastern Canada, so we're focused on informing customers about what we're doing to keep them safe. As restrictions are relaxed, we'll return to more direct communications about the service and promoting the key benefits of ferry travel.

FC: While safety has always been a key part of our overall brand promise, we've developed our own 'Sail Safe' theme to highlight our key Covid-19 responses in an easily digestible format for any prospective customers. With more consumers in the market for UK holidays, we're also working closely with the Isle of Wight's destination marketing organisation to develop and share key messages that will appeal to new audiences.

JC: It's critical that we communicate to our passengers exactly what health and



Red Funnel Ferries' vessels provide a vital link between the Isle of Wight and mainland UK

safety measures we've put in place and what the new ferry journey will look like, so we share daily updates and messages from our CEO on our website. We've also started a 'Broaden your horizons' campaign to showcase the benefits of ferry travel, including affordable ticket prices, short journey times and the ability to drive onto the ferry in your own car, go straight to your cabin and then disembark with minimal interactions.

MK: It's important to communicate the new rules to passengers in a clear and timely manner. Consequently, we've placed special emphasis on the availability and transparency of information, in addition to the already high security standards. This is the key to reaching every Jadrolinija passenger.

WR: While the borders are closed, our campaigns will focus on our domestic market and encouraging New Zealanders to see their own backyard. We're also looking at new flexible payment options, such as 'buy now, pay later'. We'll link in with the regional

tourism offices and Tourism New Zealand as part of the 'Do something new, New Zealand' campaign.

What strategies will be key to retaining new customers?

DB: There's a great deal of uncertainty at the moment, so we'll need to observe customers' behaviour and analyse their interactions with us to ensure we respond to the needs they articulate. This, combined with third-party research, will enable us to identify emerging risks and opportunities. We'll need to make sure our processes are right and be creative in how we retain the emotional connection people have with travelling on ferries.

FC: We've had to reduce the number of face-to-face interactions with customers during the ferry journey, so it's critical that we increase the quality of our communication, both before and after customers travel with us. Focusing on the overall customer experience is also crucial for us, especially with the ongoing challenges of implementing social

distancing. Our team is working twice as hard to keep providing 'service with a smile' from behind a mask.

JC: One key strategy is to promote our efforts to become a green ferry operator. For example, we're building three new ships – two of which will be powered by LNG – and we're removing single-use plastics and improving recycling initiatives. Another strategy is to expand our services to provide more than just a ferry crossing – we want to use our expertise to help our customers find accommodation and tourist attractions in the destinations we serve.

WR: Our promotions will encourage New Zealanders to get out and see unique corners of our country. Our strategy is based around hosting passengers as one of our whanau (family) – we want to deliver the perceived value for money and help them create enduring memories. We're also focused on offering an exemplary customer experience and excellent onboard facilities that will keep passengers coming back. **CFR**