

MAKING WAVES

EMERALD CRUISES is getting ready to enter the luxury yacht market, with the brand new, custom-built **EMERALD AZZURRA** setting sail in January 2022

By Cindy Sosroutomo

Space has become a hot commodity these days. From restaurants having to position tables six feet apart, to museums enforcing timed entrances to avoid overcrowding, the need to spread apart and *be* apart has redefined how we travel in a post-pandemic world. But for a luxury yacht where there's only so much space to go around, is physical distancing even possible?

Absolutely.

Emerald Cruises, the newly merged brand comprising Emerald Waterways and Emerald Yacht Cruises, is banking on the Emerald Azzurra – its first custom-built, ocean-going, five-star luxury super yacht – to meet this new trend head on. Having just celebrated its float out in December 2020 in Vietnam, and scheduled to debut in the Mediterranean, Adriatic and Red Seas in January 2022, the glittering 110-metre-long vessel will carry only 100 passengers and boast a large outdoor area with *al fresco* dining, expansive outdoor decks where guests can take in a movie and other on-board entertainment, and a 315-square-metre main dining space that's 50% larger than most yachts in the Mediterranean. Plus, 88% of its deluxe suites and staterooms come with balconies, allowing guests to privately – and safely – enjoy the magnificent views.

All this extra space is what guests will notice first when stepping foot onboard, says Juna Ueda, General Manger, Sales of Emerald Cruises Canada.

“Guests are looking for safety with smaller numbers of people and the opportunities that are more avail-



able with small-ship cruising, whether on the ocean or rivers,” he says. “With a passenger-to-space ratio of 53 (most ocean ships are between 30 and 40), our yacht invites the guest to make themselves at home and create their dream vacation experience.

“We believe the luxury market will continue to expand and grow with ships offering more space per guest and more uniqueness of the guest experience.”

The Emerald Azzurra will be all about uniqueness, from bow to stern, an absolute necessity considering it’s marking Emerald’s entry into the luxury yacht market. A typical day onboard will no doubt include sipping cocktails at Horizon Bar & Lounge, sleek and contemporary with sumptuous bucket seating and plush carpeting, all done in a muted palette of violets and grays. Ample time will also be spent at the beautiful wellness centre, which houses a spa, sauna and well-equipped gym, as well as The Terrace, an outdoor minimalist oasis where decadent, languid meals can be stretched and enjoyed in the fresh open air. There’ll also be a marina platform on the yacht’s aft to allow for easy access to snorkelling and paddle boarding, three tenders and a Zodiac for shore landings, and best of all? A gorgeous infinity-style pool, the likes of which you would typically find at a five-star luxury resort.

On shore, just like onboard, guests will be treated to an abundance of options to stay entertained and inspired. As part of the EmeraldDISCOVERY collection of tours and excursions, guests can sign up for an EmeraldPLUS included experience that showcases local culture and traditions, such as an

exclusive concert in a Kotor church in Montenegro or a mussel cooking demonstration and tasting in Sarandë, Albania, as well as optional Emerald-ACTIVE excursions that get the heart pumping, like a guided bike tour in Kusadasi, Turkey or a guided hike to Forte Filippo in Porte Cole, Italy.

Want more? DiscoverMORE excursions are also available at an additional cost for guests and include everything from rafting on the Zrmanja River in Croatia and an authentic Bedouin experience in Hurghada, Egypt, to a jeep tour in Greece’s Corfiot countryside and a market-style cooking workshop in Jerusalem’s famed Machne Yehuda Market.

All this is designed to create a seamless, end-to-end travel experience for guests, from onboard to onshore, from day one to date of departure. And even more, with 2022 pricing set at a special inaugural level, Emerald is expecting to see demand for its new yacht to regain the momentum it saw prior to the pandemic.

“In those first few weeks when the Emerald Azzurra went on sale in early February 2020, booking demand was very strong, especially on some of the higher-demand itineraries,” says Ueda, who attributes early sales to the support of travel advisors and partners. “Long term, we expect that with only 100 guests on the intimate Emerald Azzurra, bookings will be sold well in advance as brand awareness grows. With all indicators pointing towards a large pent-up demand for travel in general and a growing demand for exceptional and unique cruise experiences, Emerald Azzurra is set up for success.”



Pool

Ueda is certainly right about travel demand. In a research study conducted by Expedia Group Media Solutions in October 2020 of 11,000 travellers across 11 countries, including Canada, 1 in 2 respondents said they felt optimistic about taking a trip in the next 12 months. Even more, when gauging traveller sentiments across various modes of transportation, public opinion about cruising post-pandemic nearly matched that from the pre-pandemic period, proving that cruisers are among the most resilient and enthusiastic travellers in the world.

Much of this can be attributed to the cruise industry’s hardline approach to health and safety since the onset of the pandemic. Cruise lines, both ocean and river, have implemented widespread safety measures at every point of the cruise journey to ensure the well-being of both guests and crew, and Emerald Cruises is certainly no different. According to Ueda, the basics are already in place across the fleet, including PCR testing, hygiene protocols, the addition of medical assistance onboard ships, quarantine-designated cabins and more, all of which align with protocols set forth by the CDC, WHO and CLIA.

With the Emerald Azzurra checking off all safety boxes, all that’s left for guests to do is sit back and enjoy the destination. For its inaugural sailing on Jan. 28, 2022, the super yacht will embark on an eight-day ‘Best of the Red Sea’ roundtrip itinerary out of Aqaba, Jordan, with Oceanview Staterooms starting at \$4,351 per person, and Balcony Staterooms from \$5,503 per person with Super Earlybird savings. Other hard-to-resist itineraries include the 11-day ‘Holy Land, Egypt & The Red Sea’ on Dec. 26, 2022, starting from \$6,163 per person and visiting Haifa and Ashdod in Israel and Alexandria in Egypt before sailing the iconic Suez Canal, and the 15-day ‘Discover French & Italian Coastlines’ on Aug. 6, 2022, starting from \$8,377 per person and sailing from Nice to Calvi, Sorrento and Amalfi before ending in Dubrovnik.

It’s no surprise that with itineraries as enticing as these, Emerald Azzurra is seeing a wider range in demographics than typical river cruise bookings. Ueda says everyone from older millennials and young Gen-Xers, to seasoned cruisers and retirees are jumping at the chance to be among the first to

set sail aboard the luxury vessel, a testament to both Emerald’s strong branding and the company’s ties to the travel agent community.

“Our travel advisor partners play an integral part in Emerald Azzurra’s success so we are working with many of them to introduce our new ship and this unique experience to their clients,” says Ueda. “Because we believe small-ship sailing will only continue to grow in popularity, our goal is to educate advisors and guests on the wonderful attributes and benefits of yacht cruising. And we’re thrilled to be able to offer a product that ticks so many of the bucket-list boxes for our cruise travellers.”

Ueda adds that both agents and their clients are loving Emerald’s inclusive pricing structure and flexible booking policy, which allows them to defer travel plans and transfer to an alternate departure date or itinerary up to 60 days prior to departure, with no Emerald Cruises fees. And when you take into account the incredible value you get when booking the Emerald Azzurra (an eight-day voyage on the Red Sea starts at just \$545 per person, per day), it’s a steal of a deal that doesn’t compromise on any of the luxe details.

Adds Ueda: “We believe that everyone deserves to experience a super yacht like a billionaire without needing to be one. As we enter the luxury ocean yacht market, we intend to make some waves.”

After the year the cruise industry has had, we can all agree that waves are certainly welcome, now more than ever. And if Emerald Cruises has its way, the little super yacht that could will be making waves for many years to come. 🌊

Emerald Azzurra Croatia



Sky deck



Yacht suite

Alliis credit: Emerald Cruises