

# Operating luxury ocean safaris

Dietmar Wertanzl, president of CMI Leisure, explains how his company can help expedition cruise operators to enhance their onboard experience



**nce the preserve of hardened explorers, expedition cruising is rapidly becoming more mainstream as operators have joined the market, older ships have been renovated and new ships have been ordered.**

Dietmar Wertanzl, president of CMI Leisure, notes that the number of available itineraries has also increased. “The Galápagos Islands and Antarctica are very busy, while the Russian Far East, Japan, South Pacific, New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, Melanesia and polar destinations like Iceland, Greenland, Spitsbergen remain immensely popular.”

According to Wertanzl, this growth has prompted operators to reimagine the quality of the onboard experience they provide to guests.

“When the expedition cruise market first emerged in the 1980s, travellers were more concerned about seeing wildlife and visiting otherwise inaccessible destinations, than the onboard experience,” he comments. “However, the arrival of luxury operators like Ponant and Silversea Cruises has changed the passenger demographic and people now expect higher quality foods, better accommodation, and spa and wellness services – today’s expedition cruises are more akin to luxury ocean safaris.”

However, it can be tricky to deliver high quality hotel, dining and entertainment services onboard small ships sailing in remote locations.



“As expedition ships are restricted in terms of size, most don’t have the space for multiple dining venues or wellness facilities, and the majority of destinations are quite isolated without easy access to airports or major cruise ports, which makes it difficult to restock the ship’s basic supplies during voyages,” Wertanzl explains.

This is where a hotel management services provider like US-based CMI Leisure can help.

“Since becoming one of the first providers in the expedition market 20 years ago, we’ve formed great relationships with local communities and established a successful supply chain network,” he says. “This enables us to ship containers from Miami to larger ports on the cruise lines’ itineraries and ensure that operators can provide a consistently good service to their guests. We can also offer competitive purchasing power, particularly for lines with small fleets.”

From its Miami base, CMI Leisure supplies turnkey hotel services for everything from food and beverage, administration and hotel management, to green cruising programmes and branding initiatives. Currently, the company manages Sea Discoverer, Albatros Travel’s Ocean Atlantic, Poseidon Expeditions’ Sea Spirit, Polar Quest’s Sea Endurance and Quark Expedition’s Ocean Diamond, Sea Adventurer and Ocean Endeavour. It recently helped new Miami-based operator Victory Cruise Lines develop its entire cruise concept before its July 2016 debut. Services are tailored to individual clients.

“We meet with operators at the start of each season to outline our goals, then we



CMI Leisure provides food and beverage services in dining venues onboard vessels like Victory I

share feedback from guests and other sources throughout the season, and conclude it with a debriefing to identify what needs to be changed in future,” explains Wertanzl. “Our qualified officers and crew have operated itineraries worldwide, so they can easily adapt our hotel management services to the preferences of different passenger source markets. For example, we’re seeing more Chinese travellers in Antarctica, so we’ve adjusted our dining programmes to their tastes.”

Noting that expensive expedition cruises are a once-in-a-lifetime experience for most people, Wertanzl says: “CMI Leisure aims to understand each client’s brand and target source market so we can meet their operational needs and deliver the ideal crew and guest experience. Ultimately, we want our clients to feel as though they’re doing more than outsourcing work; we want CMI Leisure to feel like an integral part of their company.” **C&F**

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