



# HITTING THE HIGH EXPECTATIONS

*onboard expedition cruises*

**IT'S** a simple equation: the smaller the cruise ship, the more personal and exclusive an experience its guests onboard expect.

One company that has this formula down to a fine art is Miami-based CMI Leisure Management (CML).

“When you are a passenger on a ship with 4,000 guests, you are really just a number, depending on your cabin category. What our guests like about the small ship environment is that they are onboard with guests of the same mindset and the same tastes; they love the interaction,” stated CML’s President and CEO Dietmar Wertanzl.

“On the smaller ships such as ours, the engagement with the guests on board is far more intense, more customised and more personalised. You get to know everybody, and get to know the crew. The interaction between the crew and expedition staff on board – in particular the hospitality crew – and the guests is much more engaged compared to that on the bigger ships.”

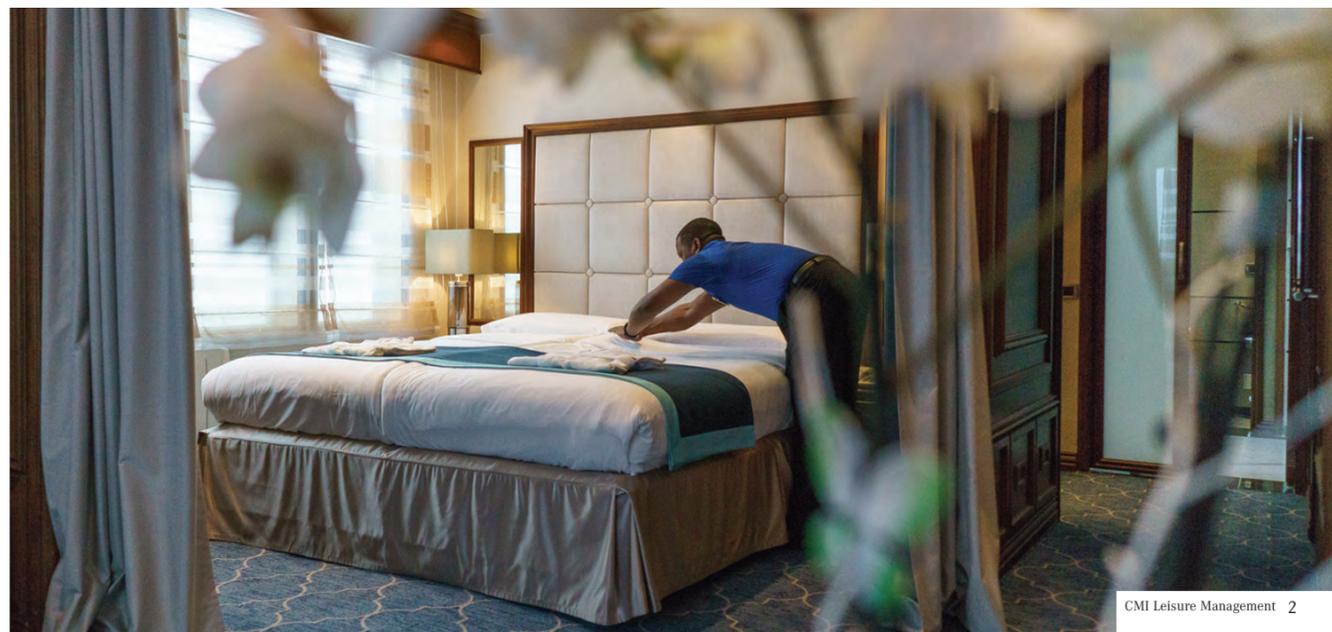
CML creates customised hospitality programmes for a number of illustrious clients in the expedition, small ship and niche cruises segment.

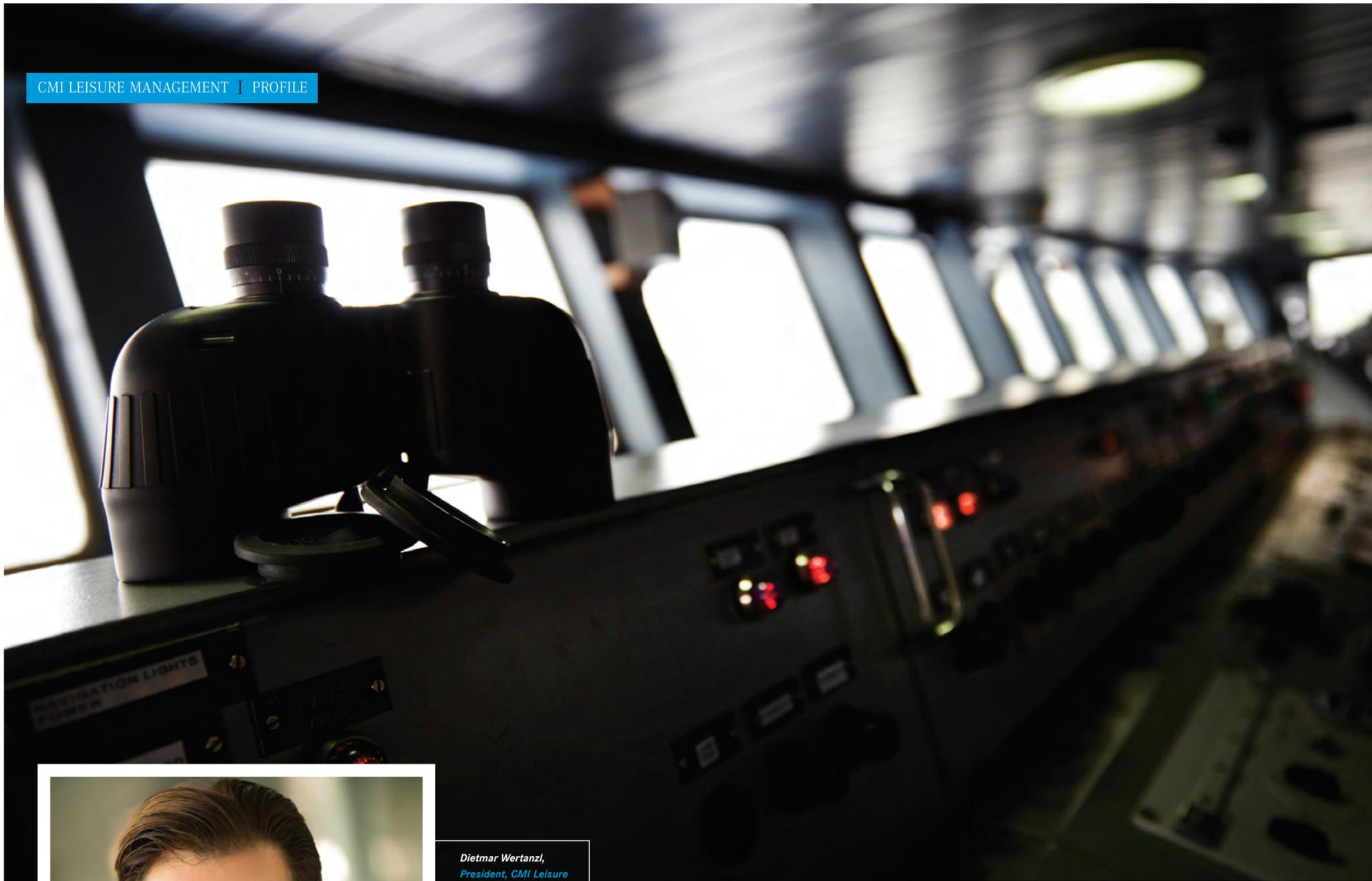
Over 600 onboard staff – consisting of housekeeping, reception, bar and dining room crew members, chefs, and logistics professionals – are complemented by 15 shore-based personnel that together deliver tailored hotel management services designed for the globally expanding small-ship expedition and niche cruise market. This ranges from traditional hotel, hospitality and culinary services, to the more complex matters that relate to sailing vessels around remote locations such as logistics, risk management, human resources solutions and consulting.

The company currently manages the entire hotel operations for eight vessels – Ocean Endeavour, Ocean Diamond, Ocean Adventurer, Sea Spirit, Sea Endurance, Ocean Atlantic, Victory I and II, Polar Pioneer and Ocean Nova for crewing. These ships, carrying just



The global interest and demand for expedition and niche segment cruising will continue to rise over the next few years, according to Dietmar Wertanzl, President and CEO of turnkey cruise hotel management and hospitality services company CMI Leisure Management. Daniel Barnes reports on a company whose onboard involvement will grow from eight to at least ten vessels over the next couple of years.





Originally built as Cape Cod Light in 2004 and recently sailing as Sea Discoverer, Victory II is being revamped to look identical to Victory I. And as with the first vessel, CMIL has been chosen as the company of choice to perform a raft of hospitality services on board.

This approach of CMIL growing its business in parallel to fleet expansion programmes conducted by existing clients seems to be a common theme.

In May 2017, Aurora Expeditions, Australia's leading polar adventure cruising company, announced it is to add a brand new, purpose-built, expedition vessel to its fleet.

Recently named as the Greg Mortimer, in honour of the company's co-founder, this state-of-the-art 104m ice class 1A ship will be built to the latest polar code specifications in time for the 2019/20 Antarctica season.

Aurora Expeditions has worked closely with US-based shipbuilder SunStone Ships to create a custom-designed ship that will be the first in a new series of high-performance vessels designed to make the ocean-going experience as safe and comfortable as possible in the polar regions.

Greg Mortimer will also be the world's first expedition cruise vessel to feature the patented ULSTEIN X-BOW®. Invented by Norwegian ship designer ULSTEIN, the X-BOW, already installed on over 100 vessels across the shipping industry, creates a smoother, more fuel-efficient journey thanks to its ability to pierce waves with much greater stability than a traditional bow. ▾



*Dietmar Wertanzl,  
President, CMI Leisure  
Management*

a couple of hundred guests per trip, can be regularly spotted sailing around Iceland, the icy waters around the North and South Poles, within America's Great Lakes, and to a select few warmer climes too.

"The most popular destination is still Antarctica," noted Mr Wertanzl. "In the summertime, the circumnavigation of Iceland has become a hot destination for Europeans and also Americans. The most recent destination proving popular for American customers is the Great Lakes, where CMIL is currently working with Victory Cruise Lines."

**New contracts for 2018 and 2019**

A relatively new player in the industry, the aforementioned Victory Cruise Lines currently operates a single vessel, the intimate 202-passenger Victory I, which launched in July 2016. But a sister ship, named Victory II, will launch from Boston this May.





Completely designed from scratch, the vessel will have private bathroom facilities in each cabin, options with balconies and floor to ceiling windows, a 180-degree indoor observation lounge and a gym and sauna.

“CMIL was also involved in the design process,” added Mr Wertanzl. “We have contributed to the back-of-house design, including the galley, which will feature the latest equipment. People like new, whether it be a new house or a new car, and we have been a part of creating it; it’s very exciting.”

This first SunStone new build is expected to be delivered to Aurora Expeditions in October 2019, with a number of further vessels delivered thereafter every six to eight months. Following CMIL signing a long term contract with Aurora Expeditions to provide the hotel operations onboard the Greg Mortimer in December 2017, Mr

Wertanzl is hopeful that this partnership can flourish onboard the other upcoming vessels too.

“We are the preferred supplier for SunStone, and look forward to growing that partnership in the future.”

### 2015 restructuring success

In late 2015, CMIL underwent a complete company restructure. Four Danish investors, including International Shipping Partners veteran Niels-Erik Lund, acquired FleetPro Leisure from the FleetPro Group, before renaming it CMI Leisure.

With the transition period well and truly over, Mr Wertanzl said the company is going from strength to strength.

“With the restructuring we installed new key department heads and feel confident we have the right people in the right job.



“This new structure has allowed us to build upon our vast experience and know-how; we have formed a very good base organisation. We know the skill set needed in the corporate office and on board the ships and now is an exciting time for us to expand.”

One area the niche cruise market segment in its entirety is currently targeting is the Chinese market, and CMIL is acting accordingly.

With the new Chinese market, we are starting to source our crew with the necessary skills to make that transition smoother for our clients and their guests,” noted Mr Wertanzl. “This is new for us. We must improve our Chinese language skills particularly in the service areas such as food and beverage and the reception desks. Therefore we have joined forces with a crew hiring partner in China. In addition, we are sharpening our culinary skills in Asian cooking, particularly Chinese cuisine.”

### With people, through people, for people

The hotel management at sea industry is, unsurprisingly, a small market. As Mr Wertanzl explained, most of the cruise companies and operators do this in-house once they reach a certain size.

Competition, he said, is on the rise due to the growing global popularity and curiosity for expedition cruises. Therefore, to maintain its position as a supplier of choice, CMIL intends to invest in the company’s biggest asset – its staff.

“A priority for us is definitely investing in talent development within our crew,” emphasised Mr Wertanzl. “Also, the development of our systems; if we have the very latest systems, this will also give us a competitive advantage.

“The hospitality trade is very much a people-centric business. I always say, ‘With people, through people, for people’. This is where we need to invest as the business becomes more international.

“Glocal is becoming more and more important for us. As such, we must be creative in everything we do, just like we are in our culinary presentation. It’s all about having the right expertise and know-how.

“After all, most of the owners we work with have now refurbished their ships, and even though they are older, they have done a great job in bringing their ships up to date. They have invested in large projects, so our commitment to investing at our end is imperative. We will ensure that we have the right people and those we have we will make better.

Beginning 2018 operating on eight vessels, by the year’s end, this number will jump up to nine. With a further agreement already signed for 2019, taking the number into double figures, Mr Wertanzl believes the future is looking extremely positive for CMI Leisure.

“We had a strong year in 2017, and the expectation is that smaller ship cruising is on the rise in popularity with growth expected in 2018, 2019 and beyond,” he concluded. ■

