

How Sunstone Ships is building towards the future

Niels-Erik Lund talks with Alex Smith about how SunStone Ships has continued to construct its innovative new Infinity-class ships while managing the Covid-19 crisis



The Infinity-class are designed to operate in the most remote locations of the world



By [Alex Smith](#)
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SunStone Ships, like the rest of the cruise industry, has spent the past year dealing with the difficulties created by the Covid-19 pandemic. Its fleet, which would normally be sailing some of the most remote locations in the world, has instead been laid up in Las Palmas in the Canary Islands. A crew of 30 to 50 people has stayed onboard Ocean Atlantic, attending to all the vessels on a weekly basis to ensure they are maintained at a suitable standard.

Though some changes are also being made to ensure the safety of guests when the vessels return to service, existing onboard features will ensure that this does not require the shipowner to make extensive modifications.

“In terms of the main concerns of heating, ventilation and air conditioning, no changes will need to be made, as none of the vessels recirculate air,” says Niels-Erik Lund, CEO of SunStone Ships. “All fresh airflow is supplied from the outside and 100 per cent of the air is exhausted to the outside, meaning that there is no air being recirculated inside the vessels from one area to another. Some minor technical modifications and alterations will be made within areas such as hotel operations, embarkation/disembarkation, cleaning, food handling, and food service, but no major rebuilding of the vessels will be required to ensure safety.”

Despite the continuing disruption to the industry, SunStone has continued to look towards the future with the construction of its Infinity-class ships at China Merchants Heavy Industry shipyard. According to Lund, the biggest challenge in the continuing construction has been managing travel restrictions.

“One of the main issues has been getting SunStone’s supervision team and crew members into China,” he says. “The team has to be kept for longer stretches to avoid multiple quarantine delays so members of the team either stay in China permanently or at least for a three-month period.”

When they enter service, the Infinity-class ships will sail to some of the most remote locations in the world. The ships will be rated Ice-Class 1A and Polar Class 6, enabling them to operate in both new and one-year-old ice conditions. They will also feature the Rolls-Royce Aquarius 100 SAR fin stabilisers, which help to reduce rolling motions. SunStone has also looked to ensure that the vessels are prepared for any eventuality by investing in additional safety features.

“The vessels are all built to Safe Return to Port (SRtP) requirements, even though this is not a prerequisite at their size,” says Lund. “SRtP basically requires that there are redundancies built in for all main technical aspects of a ship, so that in the event of a casualty, the ship can still perform. This is a very costly feature; however, as the vessels operate in very remote areas of the world, this optional safety element was extremely important.”

The third and fourth vessels in the series, Ocean Victory and Ocean Explorer, have recently completed sea trials in the South China Sea, and are scheduled to be delivered in April 2021. They will be followed by Sylvia Earle later this year.

“China Merchant Heavy Industry has been very helpful with securing visas for both the supervision team and the crew and has also been able to extend the normal maximum visa validity beyond three months,” says Lund. “A number of crew members are therefore already in place for the two vessels scheduled for delivery in April, though the number must increase within the next few months to ensure that they can redeploy out of China on a timely basis.”