

Harding+’s guest-centric strategy is on course to deliver a record-breaking year



Linzi Walker, Chief Commercial Officer at Harding+

At Harding+, putting the cruise guest at the heart of the retail experience has always been the travel retailer’s priority. “We are experts in creating memorable shopping experiences at sea,” says Chief Commercial Officer, Linzi Walker. In 2025, Harding+ plans to elevate its focus on delivering more tailored, immersive and data-driven experiences that truly delight travelers.

“Our approach is grounded in robust data, including insights from sales performance, demographics and thousands of guest questionnaires conducted annually,” she states.

Enhancing brand experiences and creating “wow ranges” are just two of Walker’s retail strategies for 2025. “We’re collaborating with brand partners to deliver surprising and immersive activations onboard our key ships, ensuring every encounter with our retail spaces feels exciting and engaging,” she explains. Leveraging guest insights, her team is constantly curating exclusive product ranges that offer unique cruise mementos tailored to customers’ tastes, whichever the partner, wherever

the region.



Harding+ developed a luxurious set of boutiques spanning beauty, fragrances, watches and jewelry for the 2024 launch of Cunard's *Queen Anne* ship

With an increasing number of first-time cruisers and family groups - especially teens and tweens, Walker notes Harding+ assortments, events and experiences are designed to reflect the shifting demographics onboard cruise ships in 2025. Working with 14 cruise line partners that range from high-end luxury lines to more family-focused cruise brands (including P&O Cruises, Cunard and Sun Princess) and operating across multiple continents, Walker points out the challenge is understanding this diversity and recognizing the distinct needs and preferences of each cruise line's guests. "Our data-driven approach helps us identify shifts in guest profiles. For instance, new-to-cruise guests now represent over 50% of the passenger mix on some lines, and the average cruiser age has dropped to 46, according to the CLIA [Cruise Lines International Association]. This is very different from the classic view of a typical cruise guest as a retiree couple looking for a stress-free way of seeing the world," she says.

Brand impact

Brand activation experiences are an opportunity for impact and engagement; on average they drive a 35% uplift in sales, says Walker. She cites research by travel research agency m1nd-set that finds 87% of cruise guests say their shipboard purchases are influenced by brand theater. Last summer, Harding+ launched an exclusive retail experience in collaboration with beauty brand Benefit, spotlighting six of its iconic products along with a limited-edition "Porecare" selection. The collaboration featured guest demonstrations, daily masterclasses on specific product focuses and eye-catching marketing materials. Tailored specifically for the teenage demographic, the initiative drove a 125% boost in sales. "Another successful brand experience was our partnership with Tanqueray, where we curated exclusive pop-up bars across three UK-based ships. Guests were invited to enjoy tastings and mixology sessions; it resulted in a remarkable sales increase of 109% over the summer," adds Walker.



As part of its partnership with Sun Princess, Harding+ has created destination fashion boutiques to enhance the retail experience onboard

Meaningful engagement

One of the biggest advantages of cruise retail is the extended time that passengers are a captive audience onboard — this could be seven days, 14 days or even longer. “This dwell time allows us to showcase products in a deeper, more meaningful way by engaging guests in conversations about the origins, features and stories behind the items,” says Walker.

A pre-cruise survey conducted recently by Harding+ revealed that 70% of cruise guests are shopping “for fun” and “to fill in time.” Passengers say they are seeking exclusive, one-of-a-kind items that they can’t find elsewhere.

Limited editions, such as single cask whiskies and destination-inspired jewelry are top of Harding+ guests’ shopping lists. Personalized services including label printing and professional engraving are found to enhance these products’ desirability.

Tailored partnerships

To ensure brand experiences resonate with guests, Harding+ works closely with each cruise partner to align with its brand identity and core passenger demographic. In the case of P&O Cruises, it’s about executing family-friendly activations and collections that celebrate the British cruising spirit; for Cunard, the focus is on creating luxury exclusives to match the cruise line’s elegant onboard atmosphere; on Sun Princess, since there is a mix of multi-generational travelers and adventure-seekers, offering destination-inspired products and engraving services helps to appeal to a broad audience.

“This approach keeps guests returning to our shops - many times during a single voyage, while also creating a meaningful connection to their trip. Our goal is to offer fresh, dynamic and tailored retail experiences that capture guests’ attention and loyalty,” concludes Walker.