

Starboard steers emotional connection from cruise retail to land-based retail



Lisa Bauer, CEO, Starboard Group

Counting over 90 shops with 15 cruise partners, not least a 20+ year partnership history with Royal Caribbean, Starboard Group (Starboard) is a leading player in the cruise retail category. Further to its divestiture from LVMH in December 2023 and its following corporate restructuring in September 2024, the retailer has bold plans for more land-based retail expansion while continuing to build its reputation for first-at-sea concepts.

In 2025, the retailer's plans include elevating its guest-centric focus through multi-location analysis of traveler behaviors, preferences and expectations onboard cruise ships. "We're leaning into personalization to create curated experiences that resonate with each guest profile," says Lisa Bauer, CEO.



Recently launched across several cruise lines, Starboard's "Beauty for All" mantra has a new AR-enhanced personalization tool, SkInsight

Starboard also recently expanded into land-based retail with the debut of its first boutique with Westgate Resorts in Las Vegas, providing guests and local visitors with curated assortments, personalized services and engaging activations. It is a dual strategy that crosses both duty free and resort operations, and according to Bauer, it "emphasizes experiential retail and a blend of shopping with entertainment that is destination-focused to ensure guests connect emotionally with the products and experiences Starboard now offers."

Tailored product assortments

For its cruise partnerships, which include shops onboard 90+ ships on major cruise lines, Starboard tailors its retail offer per guest demographic. "Each cruise partner has its unique brand identity and itinerary, which guide our tailored product assortments," says Bauer. For luxury-focused lines, this means highlighting exclusive, high-end offerings; for family-oriented cruises, it means featuring accessible, memory-making products and kid's assortments; while adventure-focused cruise lines prioritize practical gear and destination mementos.



The cruise retailer's luxury division opened a one-of-a-kind Bvlgari boutique on the Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection's newest yacht, *Ilma*

Meanwhile, a destination-led approach is needed for the Westgate Resorts partnership. "For our land-based partner, we recently launched a luxury boutique and a fashion jewelry boutique, as well as a trendy shop complete with handbags, candles, sunglasses, and more," she comments. "It's about curating a vibrant world for every guest and complementing each partner's vision."

Ways to engage

Brand partnerships are led by data-driven insights that help the team at Starboard design "engagement moments" that align with its cruise line guests' preferences and interests. Bauer says, "For younger travelers, we create interactive and digital-first activations; families might enjoy hands-on workshops, while luxury travelers are offered exclusive unveilings or private shopping appointments. Customization ensures each demographic feels catered to in a meaningful way."

Partner promises

For Royal Caribbean, Starboard wanted to focus on cutting-edge tech-based experiences such as SkInsight, its AR-enhanced beauty diagnostic tool, that taps into its strategy to redefine beauty experiences onboard. Plus, the retailer is developing an exclusive branded logo assortment of clothing and gifts for Royal Caribbean that guests can personalize during their vacation.



Starboard introduced Venus fashion brand onboard Royal Caribbean, Carnival, and Virgin Voyages ships last year, marking the resort boutique chain's first-ever retail presence at sea

For TUI Cruises, with its European guest cohort onboard, Starboard chooses to emphasize local collaborations and culturally resonant experiences, ensuring their guest is at the center of every purchasing decision.

One of Starboard's latest multi-ship launches took place in November 2024 when it introduced Venus Fashion onboard Royal Caribbean, Carnival, and Virgin Voyages ships, marking the brand's first-ever retail presence outside of e-commerce.

The watches and jewelry category is also a strong area for Starboard. Recent highlights, according to Bauer, have been a very special unveiling of a Swiss timepiece space on Royal Caribbean's Oasis of the Seas featuring Breitling, Hublot, Omega, and Tag Heuer; elsewhere, it opened a one-of-a-kind Bvlgari boutique on the Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection's newest yacht, *Ilma*.

Loyalty buzz

Personalization is a cornerstone of Starboard's future customer acquisition, according to Bauer. "Through pre-cruise insights and onboard interactions, we offer tailored recommendations, exclusive products, and even personalized gifting options," she shares. Personalization also remains key as Starboard moves more into land-based retail and aims to provide guests with immersive events and activations such as trunk shows, pre-owned vintage handbag and jewelry events, pop-ups, and

exclusive-themed gatherings, which are likely to lead to higher loyalty and stronger emotional connections.