

Executive Travel

History, Heritage, Grandeur, and Elegance

An Interview with Carol Marlow,
President and Managing Director, Cunard Line

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to being named President and Managing Director of Cunard Line in 2005, Carol Marlow served as Cunard's Managing Director for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Before joining Cunard, she held positions at five different cruise lines, ultimately serving as U.K. Managing Director for Princess Cruises. Her early career, though all travel-related, ranged from tour operations to hotels to media. A former



Carol Marlow

Chairman and current Director of the U.K. Passenger Shipping Association, Marlow is a graduate of University of Southampton in England, and holds an honors degree in economics and business.

COMPANY BRIEF Founded in 1839, Cunard Line (www.cunard.com) operates three luxury ocean liners: the 2,592-passenger Queen Mary 2, the 1,791-passenger Queen Elizabeth 2, and the 2,014-passenger Queen Victoria, which entered service in December 2007. Cunard offers regular transatlantic service between the United Kingdom and New York City, as well as voyages to Europe and the Caribbean. The line also offers annual round-the-world cruise service to about 40 ports of call, including destinations in Asia, Africa, Australia, South America, and Mexico. Cunard is a subsidiary of Miami-based cruise ship operator Carnival Corporation.

Was business strong for Cunard in 2007, and what are your expectations for 2008?

We had a remarkably good year in 2007, and I think 2008 will be one of our best ever. We're in a very unique position with Cunard at the moment. Our flagship, the *Queen Mary 2*, which launched with us in 2004, is getting stronger and stronger. Her product is excellent, and her repeat factor is going up, as far as our guests are concerned. She's doing extremely well. We announced back in June 2007 that the *Queen Elizabeth 2* [QE2] is going to leave the fleet at the end of November 2008, so the bookings have been coming in. That really has boosted how early we've seen the bookings. We always fill our ships, but the QE2 is filling extremely early. She's also doing extremely well. Of course, we have been selling our new ship, the *Queen Victoria*, who joined the fleet in December of 2007. Prior to her debut, we were able to

show our prospective guests what a wonderful vessel she would be, via renderings and progressive photos from the shipyard. She's starting off extremely strong.

Can you highlight your outlook for the *Queen Victoria* and explain how she will be different from the other products?

She's very much a ship in her own right, and she has her own character. She has all the aspects of a Cunard historical liner, so she has history, heritage, grandeur, and elegance, but she has her own beauty. Her Royal Court Theatre is the first theater at sea to have West End-style boxes, making this venue unique. She has an outdoor dining option called the Courtyard, which is a wonderful Tuscan-inspired patio area, where our grill guests – those staying in suite accommodations – can dine. She's a long sleek ship, and she has an intimate feel that I think our guests will enjoy. So we're excited to have introduced her into the marketplace and look forward to the ship developing her own clientele. We have some guests who enjoy each of our ships and switch from one to the other, and we have some who like just one ship. I think this will be an ideal progression for our guests who enjoyed the QE2. And I think the transatlantic guests who tried Cunard for the first time on the *Queen Mary 2* will find the *Queen Victoria* an ideal ship for a second Cunard experience.

Guests on the ships have a need for technology, both in their rooms and outside. How much are you using technology? Do you worry that it will take away from the people side of the business?

We use technology to make our guests' lives more convenient. But we try not to allow that to take away the personal touch. Our suites still have personal butler service, where a butler can come in and help our guests with all sorts of needs and wants. We have a concierge service, so our guests can have their arrangements sorted out for them. It's convenience with a personal touch. But, of course, we have technology coming through. On the *Queen Mary 2*, we have an interactive television system in the cabins. We're putting Wi-Fi in the suites on the *Queen Victoria*, and we have Internet centers so people can stay in touch. We certainly will use



the technologies that are available to make our guests' lives easier and more convenient wherever that's appropriate, but we don't let that take away from our people. We have people who have been with the company for 30 years. Our guests come back and see them time and time again, so we never want to remove that personal touch.

Are you getting a lot of bookings from the Internet, or are people still looking for personal interaction and someone to explain the product?

A very high proportion of our business is delivered to us by travel agents, and I see that continuing for some time to come. People like to discuss their voyage and their requirements with someone. We have many travel agents throughout the United States, North America, and Europe who know a lot about our business and our ships and are able to guide guests. I don't see that being replaced to a large extent by the Internet. However, we do offer our agents online bookings in some of the countries we trade in, and we're working on that in others. We find that our travel agents use our online bookings in the United States, the U.K., and parts of Europe quite widely.

Did you know early on that the travel industry was where you wanted to spend your career?

I wanted to do something where I would bring people enjoyment. I wanted to try to make their dreams come true. So travel was an area where I could bring happiness and joy to people. So, yes, I was fascinated by travel. I think it is something that everybody should do as much as they can. I think it's a great shame to stay in just one little place and not experience as much as one can. To help people travel around the world sounded like a great idea to me. ●

Queen Victoria, one of the most famous ships in the world