

Going Where The Big Ships Can't

An Interview with Janet Bava, Chief Commercial Officer, Windstar Cruises

EDITORS' NOTE Cuban born and Miami raised, Janet Bava found her love for travel at a young age. She had her first taste of cruising at the age of 15 when she celebrated her quinceañera onboard a Royal Caribbean cruise ship and never looked back. She describes herself as a cruise lifer and internationally travel driven – she even met her husband while traveling through Italy during her college years. Prior to joining Windstar Cruises during the summer of 2023, Bava was most recently the Chief Marketing Officer for AmaWaterways River Cruises and she has spent upwards of 20 years working in the travel industry. Most notably, prior to AmaWaterways, Bava was the VP of Marketing (The Americas) for Silversea Cruises where she fell in love with small-ship luxury cruising. Bava graduated from Florida International University with a marketing and international business degree.



Janet Bava

and Eastern Canada, the Middle East, and the South Pacific, including a ship year-round in Tahiti. Windstar launched the \$250 Million Star Plus Initiative to transform the three all-suite Star Plus Class yachts with new suites, restaurants, and a world-class spa and fitness center. The award-winning line is known for immersive experiences, destination authenticity, port-intensive itineraries, exceptional service, and an innovative culinary program.

What excited you about the opportunity to join Windstar Cruises and made you feel it was the right fit?

Returning to the ocean cruise world holds a deep personal significance for me. It's not just a professional endeavor for me – it's a journey back to where my passion for cruising first set sail. My connection to the sea, and the love for the industry, was ignited at the age of 15 when I embarked on my very first cruise departing from my hometown in Miami with my family and close friends to celebrate my milestone birthday, which has such significance as a Latina female.

I'm thrilled to not only return to my roots, but also to expand my responsibilities and grow professionally. It's an exciting prospect

to be part of Windstar Cruises, a beloved brand that has a rich history of providing exceptional experiences at sea. What's even more exhilarating is the opportunity to work in a new category that focuses on yacht-style sail ships. This presents a fresh and invigorating challenge, and I'm eager to bring my expertise to this unique aspect of the cruising world.

Will you provide an overview of your role and areas of focus?

As Chief Commercial Officer, I'm responsible for driving strategic growth initiatives, a multifaceted responsibility that encompasses a range of vital revenue generating functions within our organization leading marketing, sales, reservations, revenue management and deployment teams to achieve our overarching objective: to elevate our company's position in the global cruise market.

Will you highlight the history of Windstar Cruises and how you define the Windstar difference?

Windstar Cruises is part of the Xanterra Travel Collection, a group of global hospitality and travel companies, one of which traces its history back over a hundred years of operating our country's iconic national parks, including Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, Glacier, Death Valley, and many others. Xanterra Travel Collection is owned by The Anschutz Corporation, the ultimate owner of the Broadmoor, Sea Island, and entertainment giant AEG, Anschutz Entertainment Group. Windstar is the only cruise company in the collection and has a long history of "going where the big ships can't."

When Windstar began in the early 1980s, it was comprised solely of motorized sailing vessels. It continued to be known as a "sailing ship" company when it was owned by Holland America Line, but after the sale to Xanterra Travel Collection in 2011, the line expanded to include the acquisition of three additional all-suite yachts – ones without sails. Windstar subsequently launched the \$250 Million Star Plus Initiative to transform the three all-suite yachts, now dubbed the Star Plus Class yachts, with new suites, restaurants, and a world-class spa and fitness center – a project which was completed in 2022. Despite being comprised of three motorized sailing yachts – dubbed our Wind Class yachts – and three Star Plus Class yachts, the Windstar experience is singular.

COMPANY BRIEF Windstar Cruises (windstarcruises.com) operates a fleet of six boutique all-suite and sailing yachts carrying 148-342 guests. Small ship cruises sail throughout Europe, the Caribbean, Costa Rica and the Panama Canal, Asia, New England



Wind Spirit, a sleek, four-masted sailing yacht accommodating 148 guests



Windstar guests enjoy Mallorca, Spain

The award-winning line is known for immersive experiences, destination authenticity, port-intensive itineraries, exceptional service, and an innovative culinary program. At Windstar, we like to say that we are 180 degrees from ordinary. You can take all our guests and crew, and they would not even fill one life boat on a modern mega ship. Windstar is manageable, intimate, cozy, and unpretentious. It is a cruise line where like-minded cultured, social, and worldly people come together with attentive and unobtrusive staff. Windstar's small but nimble yachts can access places and waterways large ships simply cannot, even in big cities like London, Windstar sails up the Thames and berths at Tower Bridge; getting to dock in Dubrovnik and Venice when big ships are turned away; accessing ports big ships could never dream of, like Gustavia on gorgeous St. Barts.

Will you provide an overview of Windstar's destinations?

Windstar Cruises prides itself on offering a diverse array of enchanting destinations to our discerning guests. In Europe, we navigate the historic waters of the Mediterranean, weaving through the stunning Greek Isles, exploring the coastal gems of Italy and Croatia, and discovering the allure of the French and Spanish Rivas. Our voyages also include the enchanting ports of Northern Europe, taking travelers on captivating journeys to the British Isles, the majestic fjords of Norway, and the iconic cities of the Baltic.

In the Caribbean, we offer an escape to paradise, with our ships gliding through the crystalline waters of the Caribbean Sea. From the sun-kissed beaches of the Windward Islands to the vibrant culture of the West Indies, our Caribbean cruises promise a tropical dream come true.

For those seeking exotic adventures, our itineraries take us to the lush rainforests and captivating wildlife of Costa Rica and the awe-inspiring engineering marvels of the Panama Canal. Meanwhile, our Asian journeys transport travelers to the vibrant markets and storied histories of Southeast Asia, with visits to Thailand, Malaysia, and more.

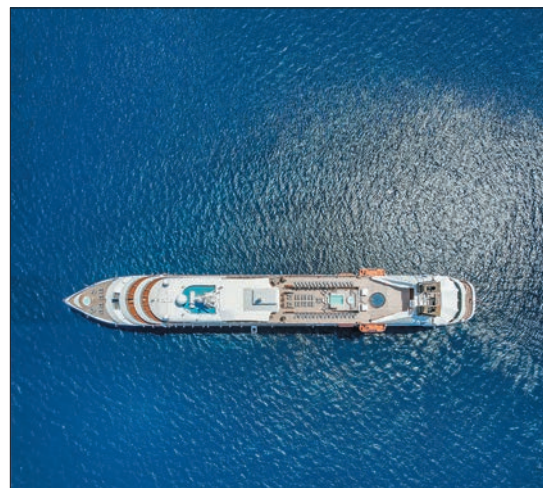
Venturing to North America, we explore the scenic beauty of New England and Eastern Canada. These cruises showcase the splendor of the fall foliage, the rich maritime heritage of the region, and the historic charm of coastal towns.

In the South Pacific, we maintain a year-round presence in the romantic islands of Tahiti, where the azure waters, overwater bungalows, and Polynesian culture create an unparalleled paradise. With over 36 years of sailing experience in Tahiti, our voyages in this region offer an idyllic escape to some of the world's most coveted destinations.

Windstar Cruises is dedicated to delivering beyond ordinary experiences to our guests across these diverse destinations, ensuring that every voyage is a memorable journey of exploration and enrichment.

How is new technology impacting the way Windstar Cruises operates?

We're always leveraging new technology and upgrading our systems to take advantage of relevant and logical advances. For example, we've been at the forefront of using Starlink Maritime for high-speed, broadband satellite internet capabilities both while sailing and when in port. We've also recently completed a major re-engine project – utilizing the latest selective catalytic reactors to reduce emissions – allowing Windstar to travel with a softer footprint on the environment.



One of Windstar's three all-suite Star Plus Class yachts

Luxury is a word that is used often today. How do you define the meaning of a true luxury travel experience?

Windstar's luxury is a quiet luxury. For us, a luxury travel experience is one that's highly personalized intuitive service from a genuinely caring crew who will remember the guest's name and preferences before the first day is over. It's a very relaxed social ambiance with like-minded cruisers who are travelers, not tourists. Windstar's sailings target luxury clients that are looking for customizable, high-end experiences that allow for a great deal of local immersion. Luxury also means eating well. To that end, we are the Official Cruise Line of the James Beard Foundation and have an elevated culinary program featuring an array of fresh, seasonal ingredients sourced from each port along the journey.

Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women to grow and lead in the industry?

It's really inspiring to see the strong opportunities that have emerged in the last decades for women to grow and lead in the

cruise industry. Windstar Cruises is committed to diversity and inclusion and is proud of our shoreside executive team, where several women lead the company in a variety of departments contributing their expertise to our continued success. Additionally, our commitment to gender equality extends to our onboard leadership, where we're glad to have an array of female leaders.

One remarkable example is Windstar Captain Belinda Bennett, who holds the distinction of being the world's first Black female cruise ship captain. Captain Bennett's trailblazing career is a testament to the industry's growing inclusivity and recognition of women's capabilities in leadership roles. Her presence on board our ships is not only inspiring, but also symbolic of the broader shifts happening in the industry.

I am grateful for all the women that have supported and inspired me throughout my career. These women have not only supported me, but also have made great contributions to the industry's continued growth and development – some who are now leading companies like Barbara Muckermann, named President of Silversea this year, to Alice Norsworthy, President, Global Marketing and Sales at Universal Parks and Resorts, to Kristin Karst, who co-founded AmaWaterways. Last, but not least, I will never forget Betsy O-Rourke – while being the CMO at Royal Caribbean promoting me when I came back from maternity leave and later in life her recommendation to becoming her successor for my current role. Without these women in my career trajectory, I could not have achieved what I have been able to achieve to date.

You have spent your career in the hospitality industry. What has made the industry so special for you?

The hospitality industry, particularly in the context of global cruising, holds a unique and profound significance in my career. It's the dynamic blend of personal and professional growth based on my passion for traveling the world with my family from a very young age.

Connecting with people from all corners of the globe provides an avenue for cultural exchange, forging bonds with individuals from diverse backgrounds, and fostering a sense of global community. This aspect is particularly enriching for me as a Latina, as it allows me to celebrate and share my own heritage while learning from and appreciating the cultures of our guests and colleagues.

The hospitality industry is truly a realm of endless possibilities. It's a place where I've been able to ascend the ranks and take on leadership roles. This industry has given me the opportunity to inspire and empower others.

The world of cruising is a platform for delivering extraordinary experiences. We have the privilege of creating lifelong memories for our guests, helping them explore new horizons and experience the world in unique and meaningful ways. This, for me, is a source of immense pride and motivation. ●