

The Azamara Spirit

An Interview with Carol Cabezas, Chief Operating Officer, Azamara

EDITORS' NOTE In her current role, Carol Cabezas is responsible for the full range of operations of the cruise line including sales, marketing, revenue, finance, deployment and shipboard operations. Most recently, she was Vice President of Investor Relations for the parent company, Royal Caribbean Group, managing relationships with the global investor and analyst community. Cabezas joined Royal Caribbean Group in 2000 and since that time has held a variety of leadership roles including Associate Vice President of National and Strategic Accounts, North America for Celebrity Cruises and Director of Sales Planning and Strategy for Celebrity Sales. Prior to her career at Royal Caribbean Group, Cabezas was an Associate Consultant at PricewaterhouseCoopers in the Dispute Analysis and Corporate Recovery team. She holds a master's in finance from University of Miami and a bachelor's in finance and accounting from the Stern School of Business at New York University.



Carol Cabezas

core of a locale, beyond the surface. An example of this is with our Country-Intensive Voyages which, together with our land programming, allows guests to focus on a specific country and absorb more of its hidden gem ports. This focused travel combined with the most late night and overnight experiences in the business – over 100 overnights and over 270 late nights respectively in 2021, gives our guests the best opportunity to connect with a destination.

I would be remiss if I didn't call out the warmth and friendliness of our crew who are the other key reason for our success. While guests are attracted to Azamara for its inspired voyage planning, they return again and again for the crew and fellow guests with whom

they create strong bonds, making Azamara a special community.

How do you define your role and what are your key areas of focus at Azamara?

My number one focus is the people of Azamara. The dedicated team members, shore-side and shipboard, all over the world need direction, motivation and guidance. If the team knows where we are going, why that is the right direction and feel optimistic about that direction, we will be successful. At the moment, my discussions with the team are centered around ensuring that when we sail again, we are adhering to the standards that follow the recommendations prepared by Royal Caribbean Group's Healthy Sail Panel. At the same time, we are ensuring the warm, friendly service Azamara is known for shines through. We want our guests to feel comfortable, healthy and safe.

COMPANY BRIEF Azamara (azamara.com) is a boutique upmarket cruise line. Azamara's wide selection of Destination Immersion® signature programming delivers authentic cultural experiences across the globe. In 2019, as part of its Explore Further offerings, Azamara took guests to more than 316 ports in 78 countries, including 268 late night stays and 150 overnights. Azamara's commitment to Destination Immersion cruise experiences coupled with exceptional authentic service and inclusive amenities make for a unique cruise vacation experience.

Will you provide an overview of Azamara and how you describe the Azamara experience?

At Azamara, our expertise is providing the most immersive and authentic experiences found anywhere in traditional cruise travel. The Azamara experience is one that connects people to people, people with cultures, and people with themselves in ways that only meaningful travel makes possible. Discerning travelers elect to sail with Azamara because they are interested in exploring further. When sailing with us, our hallmark Destination Immersion programming provides guests the chance to delve into the



Azamara Pursuit off the coast of Amalfi, Italy



Azamara Quest

How has Azamara adapted its business to address the challenges created by the pandemic?

We're rebuilding while we're not sailing. We are adapting to the times through the implementation of different protocols surrounding health and safety. When we return, although we've faced pandemic-related challenges, we'll continue connecting people to cultures, while providing uncompromised, authentic service aboard our boutique hotel at sea.

As part of Royal Caribbean Group, an expert panel has been assembled called the Healthy Sail Panel, which consists of a diverse group of globally recognized leading experts in areas of science and public health. We are working in cohesion with these experts as they constantly develop recommendations for cruise lines to advance their public health response to COVID-19, improve safety and establish health protocols that protect everyone and provide an enjoyable cruise experience.

How do you describe the Azamara passenger and how broad is the target market?

Our passengers are empty nesters with an explorer mindset. They are a cultured group that is motivated by enriching their life experience. Age doesn't matter here as they're driven by exploring new destinations, meeting new people and feeling youthful. They have the means to indulge in the finer side of traveling and the time to fully immerse in new cultures.

Will you highlight the strength of the Azamara team and its focus on the customer experience and providing personalized service?

At Azamara we pride ourselves on offering the service that one would find at a boutique hotel – friendly, personalized and genuine. The Azamara team is

dedicated to this type of authentic service that is not contrived, with the ability to anticipate the needs of all our guests. Our team provides a level of service that guests will not find elsewhere; they become family to our guests. While Azamara's destination offerings are what draws our cruisers to get on board with us, it is our crew and officers that deliver an exceptional experience that keeps guests coming back.

Our team will always remain committed to our mission to connect people to people, people with cultures, and people with themselves through the most meaningful travel experiences possible. Our guests choose Azamara because they want to dig deeper and want to discover ways of life far different from their own and to venture beyond the beaten path, which can only be made possible through the dedicated and anticipatory service that our team delivers to each and every one of our guests.

This is something that will always remain a strong aspect of our brand, regardless of the health and safety changes put in place as a result of the pandemic. We will always continue to deliver the most authentic service that is true to the Azamara spirit.

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

Absolutely. Times are changing and women have more opportunities to remain in the workforce while nurturing a family. We see this in many high-profile areas, such as government where we now have a female vice president and 141 women who will serve in Congress beginning in January, a record number for our country. The same is happening in corporate America where 37 female CEOs are now leading Fortune 500 companies. The cruise industry is a

microcosm of the corporate sector with its own growing portfolio of female leadership. When looking at the Azamara brand and our vision, women have been able to rise through the ranks within our company and have brought refreshing energy and a range of perspectives to our team.

Diversity in teams, with an open and supportive opportunity for dialogue, yields better results, and this is clear with diverse leadership teams at various cruise brands. Elevating women to leadership positions brings a new way of thinking and a unique perspective. To have women in these positions also gives us a stronger understanding of our customers. We as women have different ways of engaging and that is vital to making that human connection in our industry.

My sense is the current leaders in the industry will continue to select the best candidates, including women, to gain greater responsibility and serve in higher positions. The pool of candidates has an increasing number of women and they will be seen in positions of influence in increasing numbers, of that I am confident.

What are the keys to the recovery and rebuilding of the cruise industry from the pandemic?

The keys to the recovery and rebuilding of the cruise industry as a result of the pandemic first begins with a priority focus on health and safety in everything that we do for our guests and crew. Our industry has a collective responsibility for the highest safety standards and we all share the common goal for a safer resumption of cruise voyages, which has been a collaborative effort with other cruise brands. We have worked closely with the Healthy Sail Panel, whose recommendations are informing our company-specific health and safety protocols for a robust, thoughtful and comprehensive return to service plan.

Another key element to this recovery is a focus on keeping the guest experiences just as exceptional and at the high caliber that we have always delivered, regardless of the new health and safety protocols put in place. It is vital for us to continue to deliver new experiences for guests that will keep them engaged and eager to return to traveling once they feel comfortable enough to do so. After a very sedentary year for travelers, they will want to explore even more in the future and will seek bucket-list types of travel experiences to make up for lost time, so it is important for us to continue to create these special and new experiences in response to the pent-up demand. To provide peace of mind to our guests, we've created the Cruise with Confidence program, which gives them the confidence to plan a future cruise with the flexibility of canceling up to 48 hours before sailing.

Ultimately, our goal is to instill excitement and confidence about travel into our guests again and to ensure they will continue to be amazed by the immersive and authentic Azamara experience by delivering new itineraries that they won't find anywhere else. ●