Operational certainty

The hidden competitive advantage in cruise operations

The cruise industry is enjoying unprecedented momentum. A record 37.2 million passengers sailed in 2025, new brands continue to enter the market, and more than 75 passenger ships are on order. At the same time, operators face rising guest expectations, tighter regulations, and increasing operational complexity.

Behind every successful cruise operation is an infrastructure that keeps ships sailing safely, efficiently, and reliably. Two areas have become especially strategic: dry-dock execution and crew management. Once viewed as operational necessities, they are now recognised as key contributors to operational resilience, financial performance, brand reputation, and long-term growth.

"Successful cruise operations are built on operational certainty, and dry-dock execution and crew management are two of its most important pillars," says Frits van der Werff, vice president of commercial at Anglo-Eastern's Cruise and Leisure Division *(pictured inset)*.

"When executed well, they reduce operational risk, protect schedules and guest satisfaction, and give operators the confidence to focus on growing their business."

Professional third-party ship management remains relatively uncommon in cruising compared with merchant shipping, creating opportunities for specialist partners to deliver greater certainty.

Dry-docks: from maintenance window to risk management

Dry docks have evolved far beyond routine maintenance. Environmental upgrades, hotel refurbishments, digital integrations, and efficiency projects must all be completed within tightly controlled schedules where every additional day off hire affects revenue and guest experience.

Anglo-Eastern supports this through a global organisation managing more than 700 vessels under technical management and around 500 under crew management. Specialist capabilities from Anglo-Eastern Technical Services and SeaQuest provide dry-dock planning, emissions solutions, project supervision, and newbuilding expertise, with more than 1,000 newbuildings and conversions delivered.

"Owners are looking for predictability," says van der Werff. "They want projects delivered safely, on budget, and on schedule, because operational certainty protects both their commercial commitments and their brand."

Crew as a competitive advantage

Crew management has become equally strategic. Cruise operators must recruit, train, and retain highly skilled seafarers while meeting evolving regulatory, technical, and hospitality requirements. Anglo-Eastern recruits globally through its own training network, including the Anglo-Eastern Maritime Academy, maintaining seafarer retention above 95 per cent.

"Cruise ships are different because the ship talks back," says Dietmar Wertanzl, president and CEO of Anglo-Eastern Leisure Management. "Every crew member contributes to the guest experience, so technical competence must be matched by service culture and behavioural training."

Certainty in practice

This approach was demonstrated during the delivery of *Four Seasons I*. Anglo-Eastern Cruise Management supported the project from construction through entry into service. Bespoke operating procedures, technical management, crew recruitment, hospitality-focused training, and round-the-clock shore-side support helped prepare one of the industry's most distinctive ultra-luxury yachts.

As cruise brands continue to expand, operators are reassessing which activities truly differentiate their business and which are better entrusted to specialist partners.

Operational certainty is increasingly recognised as a competitive advantage, reducing risk, protecting reputation, and allowing operators to focus on delivering exceptional guest experiences.