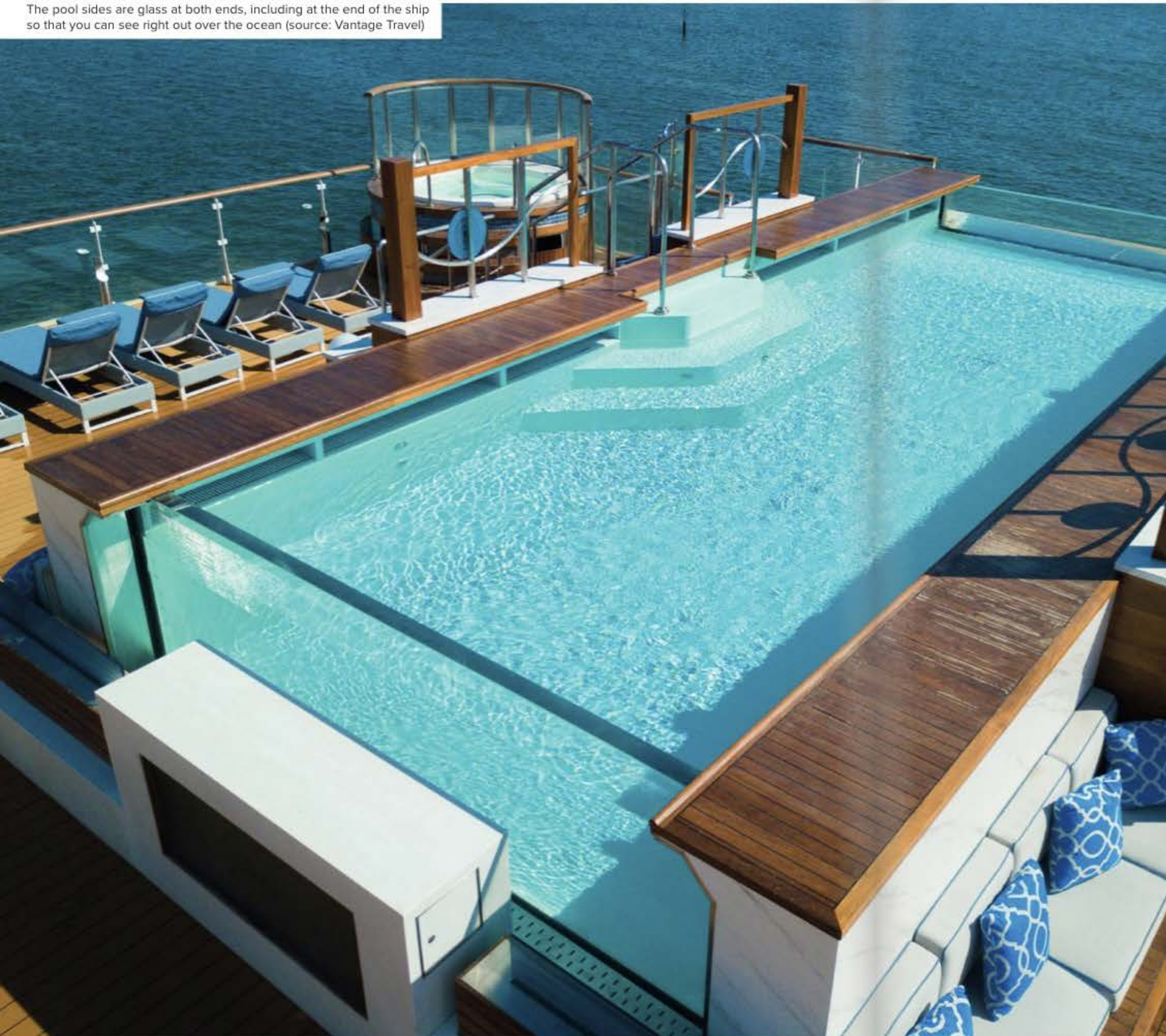


The pool sides are glass at both ends, including at the end of the ship so that you can see right out over the ocean (source: Vantage Travel)



SunStone Ships' *Ocean Explorer*: how its interiors boost ocean panoramas

A LOUNGE ON THE BOW, A GLASS-EDGED POOL AND AN 'INSIDE-OUTSIDE' RESTAURANT WILL HELP PASSENGERS MAKE THE MOST OF THE OCEAN VIEWS ON SUNSTONE SHIPS' *OCEAN EXPLORER*

SunStone Ships' *Ocean Explorer* creates atmosphere and enhances the beauty of ocean scenes and warm weather with its clever and thoughtful use of glass walls and partitions.

Ocean Explorer, the second Infinity-class ship that was delivered in July 2021, has been chartered by Vantage Travel in Boston – and has achieved several firsts. It is the first oceangoing ship Vantage will operate (the company has its own river cruise ships).

Vantage Travel, which specialises in small cruise ships and whose market is focused on Americans, has operated for many years but until now, has chartered space on other operator's oceangoing cruise ships, including those belonging to Ponant and Hurtigruten. It has also used SunStone Ships' *Ocean Diamond*. Now, with *Ocean Explorer*, the company has its own ship, and is also chartering SunStone Ships' newbuild *Ocean Odyssey*, which will be delivered next year. This will be identical to *Ocean Explorer*.

In another first, *Ocean Explorer* is different to SunStone Ships' other

cruise vessels, which are destined for polar regions. *Ocean Explorer*, in contrast, will travel in warm water areas as well as cold water areas. Alongside polar travel, it will operate year-round, sailing in South America, the Indian Ocean, the Baltics and other regions.

While it has all the technical polar features of SunStone Ships' other Infinity-class vessels, including being Ice Class 1A, Polar Class 6, with dynamic positioning and zero speed stabilisers – there are some different interior facilities and features to take advantage of the warm water areas it will also travel in.

SunStone Ships chairman and chief executive Niels-Erik Lund explains, "There is as much focus on the ship as on the destination, therefore, there are more upscale interior areas."

The warm climates the ship will sail in means it has features the first ship in SunStone Ships' Infinity-class, *Greg Mortimer*, does not. One of these is the lounge on two decks in the bow of the ship. "This is an amazing lounge. There are two-deck floor-to-ceiling windows at the front of the ship's bow so that passengers can look out and

enjoy the views," says Mr Lund.

There is a library on the upper level of this lounge, which also enjoys the glass exterior, and a piano bar below it.

'BIG SHIP FEEL'

Tomas Tillberg Design, which designed the ship, give their take on the design. Tomas Tillberg Design vice president Debbie Breslauer says, "This ship has a big ship feeling for a small ship. We particularly love the general arrangement, and the way it has been developed, especially on decks five and six where the main passageways through the dining room through to reception and into the lounge create a big ship feeling, as do the two-storey windows in the assembly station and the forward area – all of the windows out front of the vessel create a beautiful, panoramic view of the ocean." To take advantage of these views, the designers created a library on deck six.

Tomas Tillberg Design partner and vice president Nedgé Louis-

Jacques adds, "The concept of the ship is whatever space you are in, you want to have visibility to the outside because the destination is part of the experience. It was very important to capture that and keep everything open and bring the outside in."

Ocean Explorer has more outside space than previous SunStone Ships, to take advantage of the warmer climates it will travel in. There are three decks, with areas large enough for all passengers. A stand-out feature is the infinity pool and its accompanying sun deck.

"The pool sides are glass at both ends, including at the end of the ship so that you can see right out over the ocean," says Mr Lund. Built into the pool is a fake fireplace. "It is a very nice layout. The fire creates the look of flames which creates a nice glowing atmosphere and is enjoyed during the evenings by those on the sundeck and those in the pool bar."

The pool is flanked by two jacuzzis at the aft end. There are comfortable couches on either side accented with

decorative cushions making it a great spot for viewing the outdoors.

Ms Breslauer says of the pool area, "The magnificent pool area on deck seven was unique for us to design as the pool is not beneath the deck as most pools are, it is an above-deck pool. Therefore, it was essential for us to visually integrate it. We created an infinity pool with glass panels at both ends making it almost transparent. The result is a unique design that looks elegant and not out of place, while still performing the way it should."

There is an artificial fireplace in both the library and at the front side of the pool. Speaking of the library fireplace, Ms Breslauer comments, "we found a fireplace that creates the ambience of a real fire. It's not digitally created but instead has depth to it and looks surprisingly authentic."

Ms Louis-Jacques says, "The idea was to create comfort as if a guest is at home, where they can sit and put their feet up. That is the ambience of the

"THIS SHIP HAS A BIG SHIP FEELING FOR A SMALL SHIP"

fireplace in the pool and library, it is like a boutique hotel."

Another original feature is the restaurant on deck 8. This is an 'inside-outside' restaurant, Mr Lund explains. Glass walls separate the inside from the outside, which in pleasant weather can be pulled down so that the inside restaurant merges into the outside space. "It is fully heated and air conditioned and if the weather doesn't suit, the glass will stay up, but will come down to create a large, open restaurant in nice weather," says Mr Lund.

The restaurant also stands out due to its cuisine – all diners will be presented with a 'black rock', which reaches 500° and upon which they can cook their own meal. They can select beef, steak, lamb, or fish plus various other options and cook it themselves. "I love the fact this is an activity that diners can enjoy, as well as eating," comments Mr Lund.

The ship has a capacity of 162 travellers (130 on polar expeditions), with 77 cabins — and 80% of these

have private verandas. There are also 15 cabins for solo travellers.

Ms Breslauer explained how innovative technology used in the ship had an impact on the interiors. The use of Ulstein's X-Bow allows the ship to be more stable resulting in the passengers barely feeling the large waves. Ms Louis-Jacques explains, "Typically on an expedition ship, everything has to be secured and we still did that, but because it is more stable, we had more leeway with the design and the furniture we could select."

Tomas Tillberg designers were faced with the huge challenge of working through the pandemic last year – and managed to overcome all obstacles. Ms Breslauer says, "One of the things we are most proud of is that during the Covid pandemic while we were in lockdown, we still succeeded in working with our vendors to obtain the materials needed for the design, get the client's approval and miraculously managed to deliver on schedule. It was an incredible feat." ■



LEFT: An artificial fire in the library creates the ambience of a real fire (source: Tomas Tillberg Design)

RIGHT: The concept of the ship is whatever space a passenger is in, there is visibility to the outside (source: Vantage Travel)

