

MARCH • 2021 | VOL. II • NUMBER 3

# SEA CLOUD NEWS UPDATE

OFFICIAL CREW NEWSLETTER FROM  
UNICREW MANAGEMENT LTD.



## Out on test sail



## Global community backs crew vaccination to prevent another shipping crisis

The campaign for comprehensive seafarer vaccination against COVID-19 seems to be gathering speed. Vaccinations could soon become a requirement for work at sea as countries begin to insist all crew members be vaccinated as a pre-condition of entering their ports. If the lack of access to COVID-19 vaccines for seafarers continues to persist, it could force voyages to be canceled and expose the global shipping industry to a “legal minefield” and leave global supply chains vulnerable, the International Chamber of Shipping has warned.

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Published in late March and titled *Legal, Liability and Insurance Issues arising from Vaccination of Seafarers*, the ICS legal paper highlights that vaccinations could soon become a requirement as countries begin to insist that all crew members be vaccinated before entering their ports.

Elsewhere, the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China in Hong Kong released a mandate earlier this month that crew changes can only happen with those members that have had a Chinese vaccine against Coronavirus. The requirement wouldn't just affect cargo shipping, it would

impact all maritime travel, including passenger cruises. China is a popular crew-change destination but without vaccine, seafarers cannot leave the vessel and no crew change can take place.

At the height of the pandemic last year, some 400,000 seafarers were stuck at sea. Even though about half those numbers, 200,000 seafarers, are currently waiting for a waiting for a crew change to go home, the pandemic has already wiped away a few crucial guarantees provided by the MLC 2006, viz. contract terms and hours of work and rest onboard. The normal crew contract length of three to 11 months has been replaced by six to 18-plus months. Work stress is having a serious impact on crew mental health and may increase crew health and well-being costs.

Guy Platten, secretary general of the International Chamber of Shipping, recently told mediapersons that half of shipping's workforce lived in countries that may not have access to vaccines for two or three years. "We're already seeing reports of countries requiring proof of Covid-19 vaccination for seafarers," said Platten. "If our workers can't pass through international borders, this will undoubtedly cause delays and disruptions in the supply chain," Platten said, adding that lack of vaccination access for these seafarers would let loose a "perfect storm" for shipowners.

Lack of vaccines may become an obstacle to the free movement of seafarers this year. "Seafarers have already given us so much, navigating quarantines, the suspension of flight routes, and health restrictions have kept them away from their family and friends. All to keep the world supplied with essential goods," said Bud Darr, executive vice president of maritime policy and government affairs at MSC Group.

Nearly two months after Royal Caribbean Group told its crew members they would need to get vaccinated to be able to work onboard, it called upon the crew to get vaccinated regardless of which vaccine they are receiving. A similar message was put out by Celebrity Cruises. Both lines require crew to get a certificate with full details of the vaccine before reporting for duty.

Celebrity also hinted that it would be vaccinating crew free of charge without mentioned when it

## Cruise Lines requiring mandatory vaccines

### SAGA CRUISES

Saga became the first to make vaccination mandatory. Guests now must have received full two doses of the vaccine at least 14 days before embarkation.

### AMERICAN QUEEN & VICTORY

American Queen Steamboat Company and Victory Cruise Lines announced in February that the mandatory vaccination requirement for guests, crew members and non-shipboard employees across both fleets will go into effect for all sailings beginning on July 1, 2021.

### CRYSTAL CRUISES

Crystal will require all guests and crew to be fully inoculated. Passengers will be asked to provide proof of vaccination before embarkation and must have received both doses of the vaccine.

### VIRGIN VOYAGES

Virgin will be requiring all passengers and crew members to be vaccinated before they can go onboard. Virgin currently plans to start service on July 1, sailing from Miami.

### ROYAL CARIBBEAN

In Israel, Royal Caribbean plans to offer the first fully vaccinated sailings, where both crew and guests above the age of 16 will be need to vaccinated. For North America, all crew and guests age 18 and over will be required to be fully inoculated.

### P&O & PRINCESS

Princess and P&O will require mandatory vaccination for their UK summer service. These sailings are meant for fully vaccinated UK residents.

### CELEBRITY CRUISES

Celebrity will offer Caribbean cruises from 5th June with fully vaccinated crew and adult guests with those under 18 years requiring a negative PCR test result within 72 hours of embarkation.

would do so. The company will cover the cost of vaccination administered onboard its ships and any delivered on-land through agreements with local governments, but not if crew are vaccinated on their own.

In a joint statement issued recently by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Maritime Organization (IMO), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and World Health Organization (WHO), the international community appealed to prioritize Coronavirus vaccination for seafarers and aircrew. “Seafarers and aircrew need to be protected through vaccination as soon as possible, to facilitate their safe movement across borders... Our organizations fully support the timely development of an international harmonized framework for vaccination certificates, to facilitate international travel for seafarers and aircrew,” the statement emphasized.

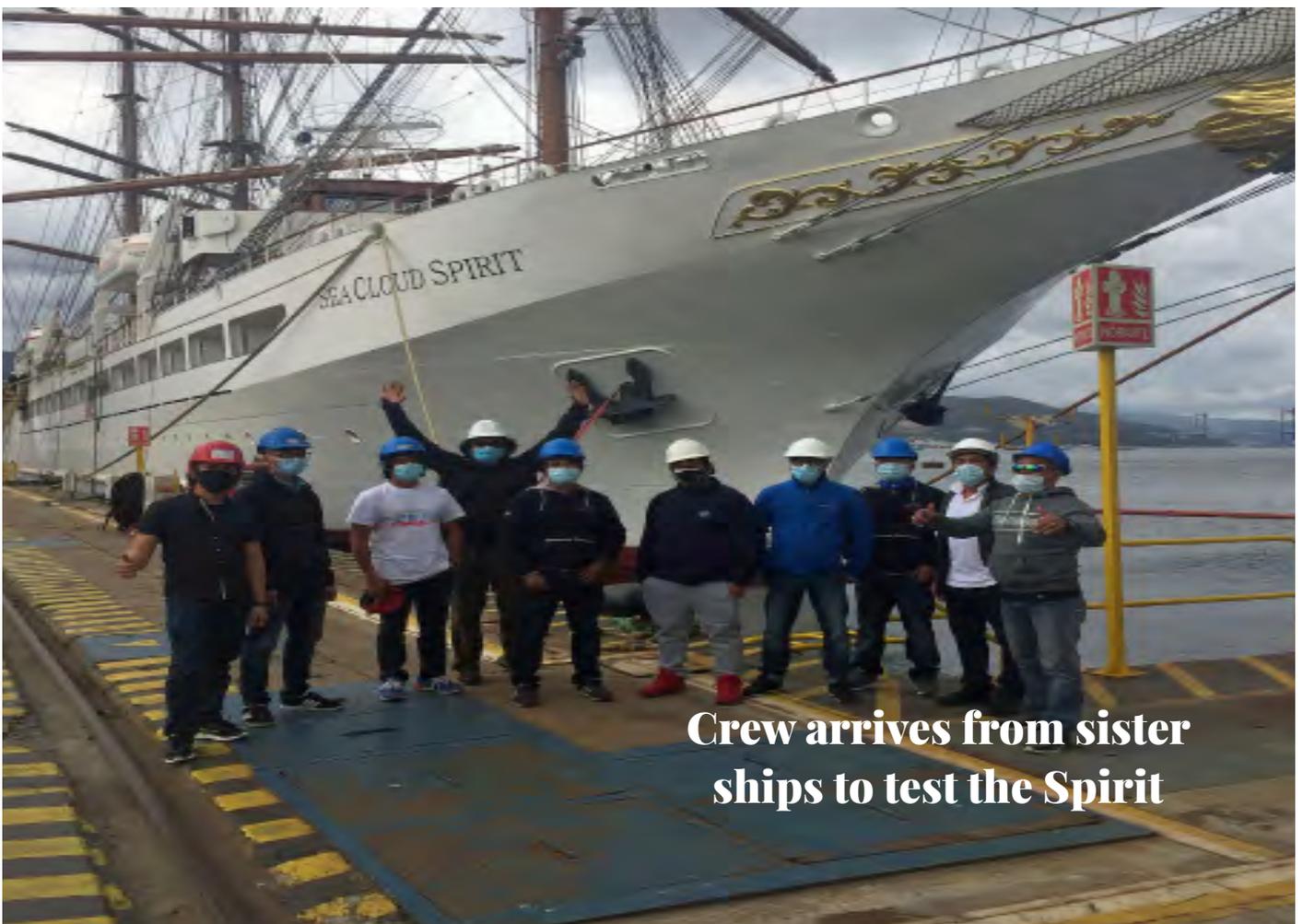
“We also call on governments to identify and prepare for the challenges of COVID-19 vaccination of seafarers and aircrew, particularly for seafarers spending long periods of time away

from their home country;” the statement added.

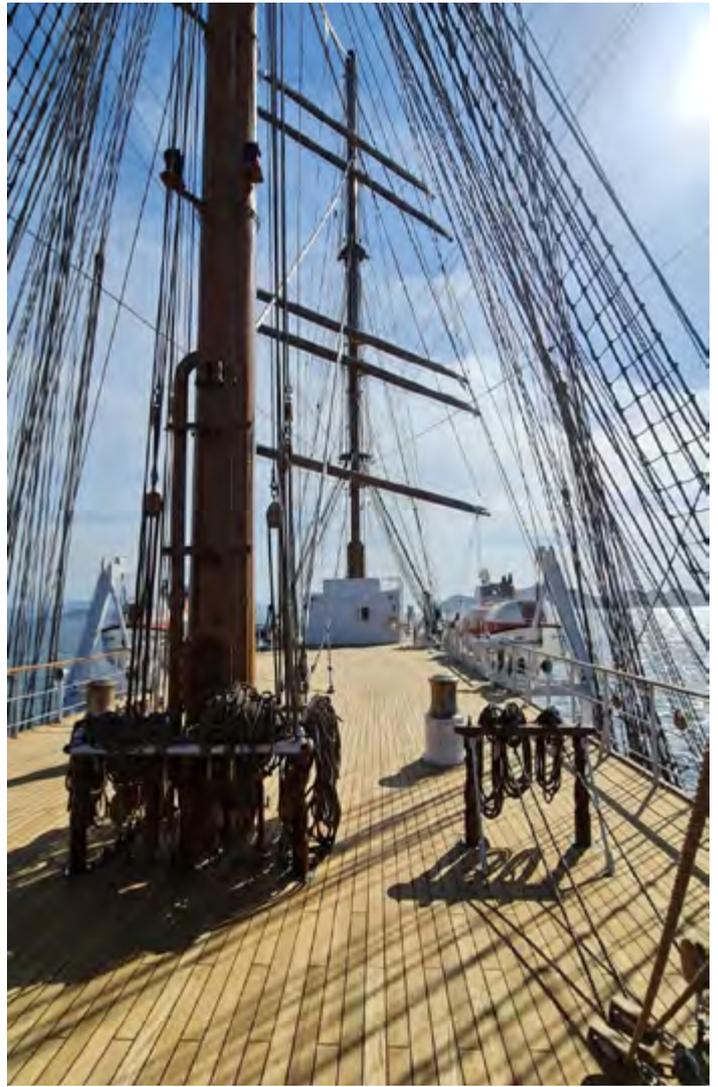
The ICS warns that delays at ports caused by having an unvaccinated crew could open up legal liabilities for ship owners and added costs. The chamber further said that owners could open themselves up to legal liabilities if they tried to change existing contracts and require vaccines, or ask the crew to receive a specific vaccine as requested by a port. They did say the owner could address the need for seafarer vaccines in new contracts.

In order to circumvent these legal hurdles, the International Chamber of Shipping is reaching out to government maritime officials around the world for vaccination solutions. One would be the establishment of vaccine hubs across key international ports. “In the short term, this means getting seafarers vaccinations in their countries where there are established programs and sufficient supplies of vaccines,” Bud Darr of MSC Group said. “In the long term, it’s about exploring the idea of public-private partnerships. There may even be the opportunity when the initial surge of need is met for national allocation, for manufacturers to provide vaccinations directly to shipowners to allocate/administer to these key workers.”





**Crew arrives from sister ships to test the Spirit**



**Sea Cloud Spirit  
on test sail**





**Sea Cloud Spirit  
on test sail**

# MASTER'S REPORT



## *Captain Gerald Schober on Sea Cloud Spirit's maiden venture outside the shipyard*

**G**ood things come to those who wait. And so, the following days had been eagerly awaited for so long. The Spirit went on its first sea trials to test the machine and rig. And what is the most important thing, when you want to try out a sailing ship? An experienced crew!

On March 26th, Ali, Ruben and Co. flew down from Las Palmas, where they worked on the two “older sisters” to carry out our first maneuvers. The guys arrived at the shipyard around 2 P.M. and I had the opportunity to inform everyone about the schedule for the next few days and to present the ship and its rig. Then we went from our planning office at the shipyard to the ship.

The next day we started at 8:30 A.M. Everyone was on board and after a general safety instruction and checking the crew cabins, at 11:30 A.M., it was about time to let go of everything — forward and aft. In fantastic weather, with a little breeze from the south-east and lots of sunshine, it was the first time that the Spirit was heading to the open sea.

Although machine testing was on our agenda for the first two days, we set all our jibs and staysails and, accompanied by other boats, we left the bay of Vigo. I felt that that not only the Spirit wanted to go out to sea, also everyone involved and there was of course no better way to show the world around us, that we are a proud Tallship.

# MASTER'S REPORT

John Masefield's Sea Fever came into my mind:

*I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely  
sea and the sky,  
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her  
by,  
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the  
white sail's shaking,  
And a grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey  
dawn breaking.*

The first night at sea all the good memories came back — the sound of the sea as it rushed past the ship's side, rolling slightly, passing the portholes. When the sun was shining again, the sea was calm, but the coffee was lousy. The Spirit is so quiet, no machine noises can be heard. Days at sea have their own rhythm; ours were determined by the tests scheduled for the day. The crew went into the rig for the first time, without setting sails, just to get a feel for how the new rig is going.

The Spirit felt comfortable on the Atlantic and around noon a few dolphins appeared on the bow as if they were expecting us — it seemed they wanted to welcome the new ship on the ocean. And that too on my birthday. What a glorious, sunny Sunday. If that was not a good omen, then what? The day passed as expected and our Spirit patiently and calmly endured everything that we made her do that day.

We came alongside in the port of Vigo to take technicians on board, early Monday morning. The Management from the Hamburg head office had announced they would like to see the near completed ship under full sails. Monday was the day of the sailors. The weather forecast promised southerly winds and a little bit of clouds. It could be better but also worse. The Pilot came on board at 10 A.M.

Once again the Spirit demonstrated it could be maneuvered excellently. The diesel-electric drives as well as the bow thruster can be regulated



# MASTER'S REPORT

continuously and slowly, and without a tug we cast off, full of joy to set all sails at sea for the first time.

Soon after casting off, we set the staysails and jibs, accompanied by countless boats that didn't want to miss this spectacle. Due to the comfortable furling system, these sails could be set within a short time. Here we were able to take the machine back and the wind pulled us out of Vigo bay with a comfortable speed of 4-5 knots. All Square Sails and the Spanker Sail followed. What a sight! Just as all of us had imagined it. To experience that moment so many people had worked for, the wait was worth it.

You can tell right away: the Spirit and the sails are made for each other. It feels safe and comfortable, and a slight swell rounds off the action.

Early evening, before sunset, we hauled in the sails. There were other tests to carry out and so we put the Spirit through all kinds of manoeuvres,

especially MOB and crash-stop. Once again, our ship came out on top. The following night, one or the other manoeuvre was successfully tested. The next morning, we were able to moor safely at the shipyard pier, hours before low tide.

The effort was visible on everyone's faces. Sometimes it is worth fighting for something, even if it takes a long time. You have to assert yourself against fate, storm and the high seas. We all were waiting for this unique moment. This is the spirit sailors are made of, and in the end, everything turns out alright.

The Spirit will be delivered in a few weeks and soon the first guests will join us on our travels. We'll meet friends and colleagues again and we'll stop at places we haven't seen in a long time. We'll have ice-cream and chicken, and the sun will be shining.



# CRUISE NEWS

## Sailing Schedule

A revised sailing schedule has been announced for all three Sea Cloud vessels.

### SEA CLOUD

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN CRUISE  
from 2nd August, including Piraeus, Nauplio/  
Peloponnese, Monemvasia/Peloponnese,  
Rethymnon/Crete, Milos, Paros/Cyclades.

### SEA CLOUD II

WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN CRUISE  
from 4th August, including Nice, Bastia/  
Corsica, Bonifacio/Corsica, Ajaccio/Corsica,  
Ile Rousse/Corsica.

### SEA CLOUD SPIRIT

WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN CRUISE  
(maiden voyage details to be confirmed).

## Prioritising vaccination will mitigate crew change crisis

Recent figures indicate that some 200,000 seafarers are currently affected by the crew change crisis, down from 400,000 last year at the height of the pandemic. But as governments re-introduce border controls and travel restrictions due to new variants of COVID-19, it is becoming harder for crew to transfer to and from ships and calls are intensifying to ensure seafarers receive priority vaccines.

According to the The Economist Intelligence Unit, some 85 developing countries will not have wide-spread access to the vaccine until late 2022 or even 2023. By contrast, crew supply markets such as Eastern Europe, Russia, India and China have the advantage of locally produced vaccines and are

in a better position to keep crew supply moving. “Unless governments move from the protectionist positions that they’ve been in for over 12 months now, and allow seafarers genuine free movement and prioritisation for vaccinations, the situation could easily spiral out of control yet again,” said Stephen Cotton, general secretary of the International Transport Workers Federation.

Filipino seafarer trade bodies have started lobbying to speed up the vaccination drive. The Filipino Association for Mariners’ Employment (FAME) recently appealed to the Department of Labor and Employment to make vaccination of Filipino seafarers, especially cruise ship workers, top priority. FAME said seafarers contributed more than \$6 billion to the Philippine economy, and a vast majority of them are unable to return to work, causing great financial, professional, mental, and emotional distress.

The association said it understood the government had to set priorities and protect those in essential services and others who bear significant risks of COVID-19 in their line of duty, but pleaded the government set priorities and include seafarers as a group whose vaccination had to be fast-tracked without delay. In support of their appeal, FAME put forth three proposals to be considered by the authorities:

1. Re-classify Filipino Seafarers to A1 priority in the government’s vaccination programme because seafarers deployed overseas are at greater risk of COVID-19 infection and death than others who were employed at home;
2. Provide mass vaccination for seafarers as soon as possible because cruise ship operations are expected to resume around the 3rd quarter of 2021, if not earlier, and when this happens, vaccination will become a requirement for the getting back on board; and,
3. If neither of these were possible, to allow the Licensed Manning Agents and their Principals to legally, efficiently, and quickly procure vaccines on their own in the Philippines.

# CRUISE NEWS

## Europe river cruise expected to begin early summer

No tourism sector has been as badly affected by the pandemic as European river cruise. Year 2020 was a near complete washout. Still, some companies tried out test excursions in 2020 to see if their new health and safety measures made passengers confident about the future. The results were surprising; COVID-19 protocols were widely appreciated by passengers with some saying they felt safe and comfortable as a result of the measures, and particularly enjoyed travelling in small groups. Customer satisfaction was high, and one operator said it had even increased over 2019.

In all likelihood, its another years of trials and errors before river cruise sees fresh wind behind its sails. European river cruising is expected to start in the second half of May, with domestic routes only, and cross-border cruises are expected to begin in July or August. Keeping in mind air travel restrictions are likely to persist most of this year, Europeans will comprise the bulk of the customers in 2021. These were the observations of the top players in the sector who met for a virtual conference, River Cruise Europe, recently.

Most expect the business to pick up speed as does the mass vaccination drive in the continent. It is still unclear if any Easter travel would take place, but some regions in continental Europe may allow leisure travel from late March or early April. Depending on the feedback from Germany and other source markets, river cruise operators may not sail their full fleets this year and, in some cases, may sail only 50% of their vessels. But the sector remains optimistic about a stronger 2022.

Air travel restrictions could have a serious impact on river cruising. Reduced capacities and higher fares will keep away overseas passengers. So the river sector should be well-positioned to accommodate cruising in small groups and sustainability as major trends in the coming years.

This could bring about a balance between tourism and the health and safety of local communities as a consequence of the pandemic.

In the absence of clear government guidelines on health and safety protocol with regard to cross-border travel, members at the River Cruise Europe conference emphasised on the importance of exchanging information about COVID-19 protocols and coordinate work on health measures. At the same time, they seem to converge on the opinion that 'security bubble' for shore excursions were not practical and often did not meet the expectations of passengers.

### Crew Change

#### SEA CLOUD II / MARCH 2021

2O Catarina Viegas, [Joined 5th March](#)

CO Stojanovic, [Disembarked 12th March](#)

### Temporary Deployment to Sea Cloud Spirit

#### FROM SEA CLOUD

Sailmaker Ali George (Romania)  
 OS Lueman Opanes (Philippines)  
 OS Benedick Cabales (Philippines)  
 Rigger Michael Bernaldez (Philippines)  
 AB Ruben A Nicoy (Philippines)  
 Deck Hand Nathaniel Benitez (Philippines)

#### FROM SEA CLOUD II

Sailmaker Frederick Buala (Philippines)  
 OS Harold Gregorio (Philippines)  
 Rigger Vilmor Gemongala (Philippines)  
 AB Roland Garciano (Philippines)

## From Jason's Desk

There are two important themes running through this month's newsletter: Sea Cloud Spirit's maiden test sail with Captain Gerald at the helm and our crew on secondment from Sea Cloud and Sea Cloud II, and prioritizing vaccination for crew in the midst of a second wave of the pandemic raging through many parts of the world, and the consequent delay in cruise shipping's return to normal activity.

The test sail was perfect! The Spirit did not disappoint, and we remain optimistic that it will be a huge attraction when it is fully commissioned and



sailing with guests. We have dedicated the visuals in this newsletter to back my claims. Take a look and decide for yourself. Our crew couldn't have been happier or prouder to take the ship out for its maiden sail on the sea.

Have we seen a definite improvement since we signed the Neptune Declaration, urging governments to prioritize vaccination for seafarers? If the answer to that question is not yet an emphatic yes, let me say the problem lies elsewhere. Most governments are not sure that putting their seafarers on a priority channel for vaccines would guarantee their return to duty at the soonest.

It is now very clear that the only way that we can regain some normality to life is with the vaccine.

As the latest information shows, it is becoming the norm that most cruise and shipping companies will require all crew to be vaccinated as a pre-joining requirement. Moreover it is expected that many countries will insist that all crew members onboard a vessel should be vaccinated as a pre-condition of entering their ports or, at least, those crew without proof of vaccination will not be able to take shore leave. Either way this could create problems at any port.

The seafaring workforce is considered to be one of the most diverse, internationalized workforces in the world and half of the shipping workforce resides in developing countries that will not have access to vaccine for upto two years. The shipping industry needs to find creative solution to this problem.

We can see that in the Philippines, the Filipino Association for Mariners' Employment (FAME) is lobbying the Government for all seafarers to be prioritised for the COVID vaccine as seafarers contributed over US\$6 billion in remittances to the Philippine economy in 2019 alone. It is known that one in every four cruise ship worker is Filipino and without timely vaccination, the Filipino nationals could lose their jobs to other

maritime countries who have already taken up the challenge and started to vaccinate their seafarers.

We also realise that there is a limited supply of vaccines in all countries and to receive the vaccine is a waiting game, where we must stand in line for our turn, but I would like to urge you all to contact your local authorities regarding early access to an approved COVID vaccine.

After more than one year, we have hope with several COVID vaccines now approved and being used, we can see our lives returning to some normality. Stay safe and keep strong!

**Photo Captions:** Cover, Sea Cloud Spirit out sailing. Page 2, Crew change in Asia. Page 4, Diamond Princess in quarantine. Page 5-Page 10, Sea Cloud Spirit pictures on the occasion of the test sail. Page 11, Sea Cloud & Sea Cloud II crew arrives to help with the test sail. Page 14, Sea Cloud Spirit's anchor.