

The Future of Cruise Tourism Through Emerging Experience Archetypes

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Publication Date: 2026/09/12

Abstract: Cruise tourism is undergoing a multidimensional transformation shaped by changing traveller expectations, technological development, sustainability pressures, demographic and lifestyle change, and evolving relationships between ships and destinations. This paper develops a conceptual framework for interpreting how these forces may reshape cruise tourism toward 2040. Drawing on a future-oriented review and thematic synthesis of contemporary cruise tourism literature, the study examines transformation at three analytical levels: sectoral drivers, emerging forms of experiential value, and cross-cutting conditions enabling their development. The analysis identifies six Emerging Cruise Experience Archetypes: Exploration & Discovery, Knowledge & Development, Premium & Individualized, Health & Well-being, Community & Shared-Interest, and Lifestyle & Living-at-Sea. Rather than representing fixed market segments, vessel types or itinerary categories, the archetypes describe potentially overlapping configurations distinguished by their dominant source of passenger value. The study further identifies technology, sustainability and human interaction as three cross-cutting enablers influencing how these experiential configurations can be designed, delivered and sustained. These elements are integrated into the proposed Cruise Tourism Futures 2040 Framework. The framework shifts the conceptualisation of emerging cruise tourism from product-based classification toward experience-based differentiation and highlights the increasing convergence of maritime mobility with exploration, learning, well-being, community and everyday life. Rather than predicting a single future cruise model, it provides an interpretative structure for analysing diversification and supporting subsequent empirical research.

Keywords: Cruise Tourism; Cruise Experience; Experience Archetypes; Tourism Futures; Maritime Tourism; Experiential Value; Cruise Innovation; 2040.

How to Cite: Anna Karadencheva (2026) The Future of Cruise Tourism Through Emerging Experience Archetypes. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 11(8), 3420-3431.
<https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26aug1624>

I. INTRODUCTION

Cruise tourism has evolved from a specialised form of maritime travel into a complex and increasingly diversified component of the global tourism system. Contemporary cruise operations combine transportation, accommodation, hospitality, entertainment, recreation and destination visitation within an integrated tourism product. As Papathanassis notes, the development of cruise tourism has progressively increased the complexity of the sector and expanded the range of managerial, technological, destination-related and sustainability challenges associated with it [1].

This evolution has been accompanied by a transformation in the sources of value offered to cruise passengers. Research on cruise brand experience demonstrates that sensory, affective, behavioural and intellectual dimensions contribute to the creation of functional and wellness value [2]. Cruise competition can therefore increasingly extend beyond traditional variables such as itinerary, vessel size, accommodation and price towards the design of differentiated experiences and more personalised value propositions.

Technological development reinforces this transition. The Smart Cruise Ecosystem conceptualised by Buhalis, Papathanassis and Vafeidou illustrates how digital technologies can connect passengers, operators and other stakeholders throughout the cruise journey and contribute to value creation before, during and after the voyage [3]. At the same time, the continued development of cruise tourism raises significant environmental, social and destination-related challenges [4], [5]. Future cruise transformation must consequently be considered in relation not only to innovation and passenger experience, but also to the conditions under which cruise activity can develop sustainably.

The diversification of cruising is already visible across a growing range of configurations. Expedition and science-based voyages combine maritime travel with exploration, learning and passenger participation [6], [7], while other developments increasingly emphasise personalization, well-being, shared interests, extended stays and deeper destination engagement. These developments suggest that cruise tourism is diversifying not in a single direction, but through different forms of experiential value.

Existing literature provides substantial knowledge about individual dimensions of this transformation, including smart technologies [3], passenger experience and wellness value [2], sustainability and destination impacts [4], [5], and expedition and science-based cruising [6], [7]. However, these developments are frequently examined as separate phenomena or specialised cruise configurations. This fragmentation creates a conceptual gap: greater attention is needed to the broader experiential logics connecting emerging forms of cruise tourism and to the conditions that may enable their future development.

Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to develop an integrative conceptual framework for interpreting the transformation of cruise tourism toward 2040. Rather than forecasting the market size or commercial success of individual cruise segments, the study adopts a conceptual and future-oriented perspective to examine the forces driving transformation, identify emerging configurations of experiential value and analyse the cross-cutting conditions through which these experiences may develop.

➤ *The Analysis Addresses Three Research Questions:*

- *RQ1. What key drivers are shaping the transformation of cruise tourism toward 2040?*
- *RQ2. What emerging cruise experience archetypes can be identified according to their dominant forms of experiential value?*
- *RQ3. How do technology, sustainability and human interaction operate as cross-cutting enablers across these emerging cruise experience archetypes?*

In response to these questions, the paper develops the Cruise Tourism Futures 2040 Framework. The framework connects five transformation drivers with six Emerging Cruise Experience Archetypes—Exploration & Discovery, Knowledge & Development, Premium & Individualized, Health & Well-being, Community & Shared-Interest, and Lifestyle & Living-at-Sea—and three cross-cutting enablers: technology, sustainability and human interaction.

The central proposition is that cruise tourism toward 2040 should not be understood simply as a technologically advanced continuation of the conventional cruise model or as a collection of emerging niche segments. Instead, its transformation can be interpreted as a process of experiential diversification in which different forms of mobility, hospitality, exploration, learning, well-being, community and everyday life increasingly intersect, while technology, sustainability and human interaction shape how these emerging experiences can be realised.

II. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study adopts a conceptual and future-oriented review approach to examine the transformation of cruise tourism toward 2040. Rather than providing market forecasts, the analysis synthesises contemporary cruise tourism literature to identify recurring patterns in the development of cruise

experiences, passenger value propositions and ship–destination relationships.

The review draws primarily on peer-reviewed research addressing cruise tourism development, passenger experience, technological transformation, sustainability, expedition and scientific cruising, luxury tourism, wellness, destination interaction and related forms of tourism innovation. Where academic literature on particularly emerging configurations remains limited, selected institutional and industry sources are used to illustrate current developments. These sources complement rather than replace the academic basis of the analysis.

The literature was examined through thematic synthesis conducted at three analytical levels. First, recurring forces associated with sectoral transformation were organised into five drivers: changing traveller expectations, technological transformation and personalization, sustainability and decarbonization pressures, demographic and lifestyle change, and the reconfiguration of ship–destination relationships. Second, emerging cruise configurations were compared according to their dominant source of experiential value and the role assumed by the passenger within the experience. Recurring value propositions were subsequently synthesised into six Emerging Cruise Experience Archetypes: Exploration & Discovery, Knowledge & Development, Premium & Individualized, Health & Well-being, Community & Shared-Interest, and Lifestyle & Living-at-Sea.

Third, cross-archetype comparison was used to identify factors whose influence extended across multiple experiential configurations rather than defining a distinct archetype. This analytical step resulted in the identification of technology, sustainability and human interaction as three cross-cutting enablers shaping how the proposed archetypes may be designed, delivered and sustained.

The resulting Cruise Tourism Futures 2040 Framework integrates these three analytical levels—transformation drivers, experience archetypes and cross-cutting enablers. The framework is interpretative rather than predictive and is intended to organise fragmented developments within the cruise tourism literature into a coherent conceptual structure. The proposed archetypes are therefore not presented as an empirically validated taxonomy or as mutually exclusive market segments, but as theoretically derived configurations intended to support interpretation and subsequent empirical investigation.

III. THE TRANSFORMATION OF CONTEMPORARY CRUISE TOURISM

The transformation of contemporary cruise tourism extends beyond changes in vessel design, itinerary configuration or technological infrastructure. At a deeper level, it reflects a gradual reconsideration of what constitutes the cruise product and how value is created within it. The traditional model, predominantly structured around transportation, accommodation, onboard services and scheduled port visits, increasingly coexists with forms of

cruising in which experience design, personalization, participation and destination engagement assume greater importance. Four interrelated transitions can be distinguished within this process: from standardization to differentiation, from service provision to experience creation, from passenger consumption to participation, and from an individual cruise product to a broader cruise ecosystem.

➤ *From Standardization to Differentiation*

Standardization and economies of scale have historically played an important role in the development of modern cruising. Large vessels enable cruise operators to integrate accommodation, food and beverage services, entertainment, retail, recreation and other tourism services within a single controlled environment. This model has supported the expansion of cruising into mainstream tourism and the development of increasingly sophisticated ship-based tourism products [1].

However, growth alone does not adequately explain the future trajectory of the sector. Papathanassis argues that the long-term development of cruising should be considered within the wider portfolio of holiday experiences and anticipates increasing technological intensity as the sector matures [8]. This perspective is particularly important because it shifts attention from quantitative expansion towards the changing competitive position of cruising within tourism.

At the demand level, cruise passengers cannot be considered a homogeneous market. Risitano, Romano and Sorrentino identify distinct passenger segments based on perceptions of onboard servicescape and experience, demonstrating the relevance of customised onboard offerings for different categories of cruisers [9]. Differentiation therefore increasingly extends beyond conventional segmentation by price or cabin category and involves the configuration of the overall experience.

This development creates an apparent paradox. Cruise tourism continues to benefit from standardization and scale, particularly within the contemporary mass-market segment, while simultaneously moving towards greater differentiation. Premium, luxury, specialty and increasingly niche-oriented products coexist with mega-ship development. Consequently, standardization and specialization should not be interpreted as successive stages in cruise evolution. They increasingly represent parallel strategic directions within the same sector.

➤ *From Service Provision to Experience Creation*

A second transition concerns the nature of value creation. Cruise tourism is particularly suitable for an experiential interpretation because passengers remain within a designed service environment for extended periods and interact continuously with physical spaces, employees, other passengers, entertainment activities and destinations.

Research into onboard cruise experience shows that passengers do not merely receive a collection of services. Their experience emerges dynamically through interactions with employees, other guests and the ship's service environment

[10]. This suggests that cruise value is partly co-created rather than entirely delivered by the cruise operator.

The experiential character of cruising also has important implications for market segmentation. Risitano et al. demonstrate that passengers can be differentiated according to their responses to the onboard servicescape and overall cruise experience [9]. Combined with evidence concerning sensory, affective, behavioural and intellectual dimensions of cruise brand experience [2], this indicates a shift from a predominantly service-based interpretation of cruising towards one centred on memorable and differentiated experiences.

The emerging cruise product can therefore be interpreted increasingly as an experience architecture: a deliberately configured combination of physical environment, service encounters, activities, destinations, technologies and social interactions. This interpretation provides an important theoretical basis for distinguishing emerging cruise experience archetypes according to the dominant form of experiential value they seek to create.

➤ *From Passenger to Participant*

A third transition concerns the role of the traveller. In the conventional tourism model, the passenger is predominantly conceptualised as a recipient and consumer of transportation, accommodation, entertainment and destination services. Emerging cruise experiences increasingly create opportunities for more active forms of engagement.

This transformation is already observable in expedition and scientific cruising. Citizen-science initiatives can involve passengers directly in environmental observation, data collection and knowledge-generation activities [7]. Research into the combination of polar cruise tourism and scientific practices similarly demonstrates the potential for tourism and science to coexist within the same voyage [6]. In such contexts, the passenger may simultaneously occupy several roles: tourist, learner, observer and participant.

Participation is not limited to scientific activities. Destination engagement also varies substantially among cruise passengers. Research on intra-destination behaviour and shore excursions demonstrates considerable variation in how cruise passengers interact with destinations [11], [12].

The distinction between passenger and participant therefore represents more than a semantic change. It reflects a transformation in the relationship between the traveller and the cruise experience. Future cruise products may increasingly be differentiated by the degree to which travellers observe, consume, interact, learn, contribute or temporarily integrate themselves into the environments through which they travel.

➤ *From Cruise Product to Cruise Ecosystem*

The fourth transition concerns the boundaries of the cruise product itself. Traditionally, the cruise ship and its itinerary provide relatively clear spatial and organisational boundaries. Contemporary cruise tourism increasingly challenges these boundaries.

First, digital technologies connect different stages of the cruise journey and multiple stakeholders within what has been conceptualised as a Smart Cruise Ecosystem [3]. The passenger experience can therefore begin before embarkation and continue after disembarkation, while digital systems integrate interactions, information and services across the journey.

Second, the boundary between ship and destination is increasingly permeable. Cruise and onshore experiences are interconnected, and destination-based activities contribute substantially to the perceived value of the overall cruise product [5], [12]. Research on cruise visitor expenditure further demonstrates that spatial behaviour, type of onshore visit and cruise category influence how passengers interact economically with destinations [13].

Third, sustainability makes it increasingly difficult to conceptualise the cruise ship independently from the places it visits. Environmental, economic and social impacts occur across interconnected ship, port and destination systems [4], [5]. The long-term development of cruising therefore depends not only on vessel-level innovation but also on relationships with ports, communities, tourism organisations and destination resources.

These developments support an ecosystem perspective in which cruise tourism consists of interconnected maritime, hospitality, technological and destination components rather than an isolated ship-based tourism product.

Taken together, the four transitions demonstrate that contemporary cruise tourism is evolving along multiple dimensions simultaneously. Standardized products coexist with increasing specialization; service delivery is progressively supplemented by experience creation; passengers can become active participants; and the cruise product increasingly operates as part of a wider ecosystem of destinations, technologies and experiences.

These transformations provide the theoretical basis for examining the forces that may shape cruise tourism toward 2040.

IV. DRIVERS SHAPING THE FUTURE OF CRUISE TOURISM

The transformation and diversification of cruise tourism do not result from a single technological, economic or consumer trend. It reflects the interaction of multiple forces affecting tourism demand, maritime operations, destinations and the broader social and environmental context in which cruising develops. From a long-term perspective, five interconnected drivers appear particularly relevant to the transformation of cruise tourism toward 2040: changing traveller expectations and experience-seeking behaviour; technological transformation and personalization; sustainability and decarbonization pressures; demographic and lifestyle change; and the reconfiguration of destination relationships.

➤ *Changing Traveller Expectations and Experience-Seeking Behaviour*

Tourism consumption has increasingly shifted towards experiences that provide emotional, social, cultural and personal value rather than merely access to services. This transition is particularly relevant to cruising because the cruise product integrates multiple dimensions of the tourism experience within a relatively controlled environment. As discussed previously, cruise experiences combine sensory, affective, behavioural and intellectual dimensions [2], while passengers differ significantly in the types of onboard environments and experiences they value [9].

Experience-seeking also affects the relationship between tourists and destinations, creating demand for more differentiated shore experiences and deeper destination engagement. Research demonstrates considerable variation in cruise visitor behaviour and interaction with local tourism resources [11], [12].

Consequently, cruise products may increasingly compete on the depth, uniqueness and meaning of the experiences they provide, favouring configurations that combine maritime mobility with exploration, learning, cultural immersion, well-being, exclusivity or other forms of experiential differentiation.

➤ *Technological Transformation and Personalization*

The concept of the Smart Cruise Ecosystem demonstrates how technological applications can connect multiple actors and stages of the cruise journey [3]. This development is particularly significant because digital transformation allows cruise operators to move beyond uniform service delivery towards more responsive and individualized passenger experiences.

Data-driven and connected technologies may increasingly enable cruise companies to anticipate passenger preferences and adapt services in real time. Research into smart tourism more broadly describes smart tourism ecosystems as environments characterised by intensive information exchange, technological interconnection and the co-creation of value among multiple actors [14]. Applied to cruising, this logic suggests that future differentiation may increasingly depend on how effectively technology is integrated into the passenger experience rather than simply on the availability of individual technological features.

Technology may also alter the relationship between scale and personalization. Historically, highly personalised tourism experiences have often been associated with smaller-scale or luxury products. Data-driven technologies potentially allow large cruise vessels to provide individualized recommendations, entertainment, dining, wellness and destination options to thousands of passengers simultaneously. This creates the possibility of what may be described as personalization at scale, where mass-market cruise operations retain the economic advantages of large vessels while offering increasingly differentiated passenger journeys.

Technological transformation should therefore be interpreted not as an emerging cruise model in itself, but as a

cross-cutting enabling force capable of accelerating multiple forms of cruise innovation.

➤ *Sustainability, Environmental Regulation and Decarbonization*

Environmental sustainability represents one of the most consequential pressures shaping the future of cruise tourism. Cruise operations generate impacts extending across ships, ports and destinations, including emissions, energy consumption, waste, pressure on local infrastructure and wider social and environmental externalities [4], [5].

At the regulatory level, international shipping is moving towards progressively stronger greenhouse-gas reduction requirements. The International Maritime Organization's 2023 Strategy on Reduction of GHG Emissions from Ships establishes an ambition to reach net-zero greenhouse-gas emissions from international shipping by or around 2050, accompanied by indicative checkpoints for 2030 and 2040 [15]. Although the strategy applies to international shipping broadly rather than cruise tourism specifically, its implications for the cruise sector are substantial because cruise vessels are energy-intensive assets with long operational lifetimes.

The sustainability challenge is particularly visible in environmentally sensitive destinations. Expedition and polar cruising illustrate the tension between growing demand for extraordinary natural experiences and the environmental consequences associated with transporting tourists to vulnerable regions. Earlier research on Antarctic cruise tourism identified a paradox between the environmental awareness potentially generated through polar travel and the greenhouse-gas emissions required to facilitate such experiences [16].

Importantly, alternative cruise configurations should not automatically be assumed to be more sustainable. Their environmental performance remains dependent on vessel technology, itinerary design, passenger numbers and operational practices.

Sustainability should therefore be interpreted as both a constraint and an innovation driver. Regulatory and societal pressures may restrict certain forms of cruise development while simultaneously encouraging alternative fuels, energy-efficient vessels, new operational practices and cruise products designed around lower-impact or more locally integrated tourism experiences.

➤ *Demographic Change, Wellness and Lifestyle Transformation*

Demographic and lifestyle change represents a fourth driver of future cruise diversification. Ageing populations, changing working patterns and evolving understandings of health, well-being and quality of life are particularly relevant to cruising because ships already integrate accommodation, leisure, social interaction and mobility within a single environment.

Well-being has become an increasingly important component of tourism consumption. The Global Wellness Institute defines wellness tourism around travel associated with

maintaining or enhancing personal well-being and identifies it as a distinct and expanding segment of the wider wellness economy [17].

Within cruise tourism specifically, wellness value has already been identified as an important component of cruise brand experience [2].

From a conceptual perspective, this is particularly important because it challenges the distinction between tourism and lifestyle mobility. As cruise duration increases from days to weeks, months or potentially longer periods, accommodation, social environment, connectivity and everyday living become increasingly important components of the cruise product.

➤ *Reconfiguration of the Ship-Destination Relationship*

The final driver concerns the changing spatial relationship between the cruise ship and the destination. Conventional cruising is based on a relatively clear division: the vessel provides transportation, accommodation and onboard services, while ports provide access to tourism destinations. Contemporary cruise development increasingly complicates this distinction.

One trajectory strengthens the destination component. Expedition, slow and immersive cruise products emphasise the places visited, longer engagement, natural environments and culturally differentiated experiences. In these models, the ship functions partly as a platform enabling access to experiences located beyond the vessel.

A contrasting trajectory strengthens the ship itself as a destination. Large contemporary cruise vessels incorporate increasingly complex combinations of entertainment, dining, retail, recreation and accommodation, allowing the vessel itself to function as a tourism destination rather than merely as a means of transportation. This perspective is reflected in research conceptualising the cruise ship as a destination in itself [18].

A third trajectory integrates cruise operations with purpose-developed destination infrastructure, extending cruise-line experience design and control beyond the vessel.

These trajectories suggest that the future relationship between ship and destination will not evolve in a single direction. Instead, cruise configurations may increasingly differentiate according to where the principal source of tourism value is located.

For some products, the ship itself will represent the dominant attraction. For others, its principal function will be to facilitate access to remote, authentic or immersive destination experiences. Hybrid models will combine both.

The evolving ship–destination relationship should therefore be understood as a driver of experiential diversification rather than as a fixed dimension for classifying future cruise products.

The five drivers discussed above demonstrate that the transformation of cruise tourism results from the interaction of demand-side, technological, environmental, demographic and spatial forces.

V. SIX EMERGING CRUISE EXPERIENCE ARCHETYPES

The transformations and drivers discussed in the previous sections suggest that the future diversification of cruise tourism can be understood not only through specific cruise products or market segments, but through the dominant forms of experiential value they seek to create. From this perspective, emerging cruise configurations represent broader changes in what passengers expect from the cruise experience and in the role that cruising may play within tourism, leisure and everyday life.

Based on the theoretical synthesis, this paper proposes six Emerging Cruise Experience Archetypes: Exploration & Discovery, Knowledge & Development, Premium & Individualized, Health & Well-being, Community & Shared-Interest, and Lifestyle & Living-at-Sea. The archetypes represent distinct but potentially overlapping configurations of experiential value rather than fixed cruise categories.

Importantly, the proposed archetypes do not classify vessels, itineraries or established market segments. A specific cruise product may incorporate characteristics of several archetypes simultaneously. Their analytical purpose is to identify the dominant source of value around which future cruise experiences may increasingly be designed and differentiated. This approach shifts the focus from identifying individual emerging cruise products towards understanding the broader experiential logics shaping the transformation of cruise tourism toward 2040.

➤ *Exploration & Discovery*

The Exploration & Discovery archetype is centred on the value of accessing, experiencing and understanding places beyond conventional tourism environments. Its defining characteristic is not a particular vessel type or itinerary structure, but the traveller's pursuit of discovery through nature, culture, exploration and deeper engagement with destinations.

Expedition cruising represents one of the clearest manifestations of this archetype. In remote and environmentally distinctive regions, the vessel functions primarily as a platform enabling access to places and experiences that may otherwise be difficult to reach. Nature observation, interpretation and destination-based activities consequently become central components of the cruise experience. Research on expedition cruising in polar regions illustrates both the experiential potential and the complexity of this form of tourism, particularly in environmentally sensitive marine environments [16], [19].

The archetype also incorporates elements associated with slow and immersive travel. Rather than maximising the number of destinations visited, such experiences emphasise greater

depth of engagement, longer stays and stronger interaction with local environments and cultures [21]. The underlying value proposition therefore shifts from destination collection towards destination immersion.

Toward 2040, Exploration & Discovery may become increasingly relevant as cruise travellers seek distinctive, place-based and meaningful experiences. Its future development, however, will depend on maintaining a balance between access and preservation, particularly in destinations where environmental sensitivity, carrying capacity and local community interests constrain tourism growth. The archetype therefore illustrates a broader transformation of cruising in which maritime mobility becomes a means of facilitating discovery rather than the principal source of tourism value.

➤ *Knowledge & Development*

The Knowledge & Development archetype is organised around learning, intellectual engagement and personal development as central sources of cruise value. In this configuration, the voyage becomes more than a recreational experience: it provides opportunities to acquire knowledge, develop interests or skills, and participate in educational or knowledge-generating activities.

Scientific and citizen-science cruising represents one of the clearest manifestations of this archetype. Citizen-science programmes can enable passengers to participate directly in environmental observation, data collection and other forms of authentic scientific inquiry. Research in polar cruise environments demonstrates that tourism and scientific practices can coexist within the same voyage, allowing passengers to assume roles not only as tourists but also as learners, observers and contributors [6], [7].

The archetype can, however, extend beyond formal scientific participation. Expert-led programmes, educational voyages, cultural interpretation, workshops and other forms of structured learning can transform the cruise environment into a temporary platform for knowledge acquisition and personal development. The defining principle is therefore not the specific subject being studied, but the integration of learning and development into the core value proposition of the cruise experience.

Toward 2040, the Knowledge & Development archetype may be strengthened by partnerships among cruise operators, universities, research institutions, cultural organisations and destination-based experts. Digital technologies may further expand opportunities for interactive learning and access to specialised knowledge. In this context, cruising can increasingly combine mobility, hospitality and leisure with education and participation, extending the traditional boundaries of the cruise tourism product.

➤ *Premium & Individualized*

The Premium & Individualized archetype is centred on exclusivity, personalization and individual control over the cruise experience. Rather than being defined solely by price or conventional notions of luxury, it reflects a broader shift

towards cruise experiences designed around individual preferences, privacy, flexibility and differentiated service.

Luxury yacht and superyacht cruising represent clear manifestations of this archetype. Smaller passenger capacity, personalised service, flexible itineraries and access to less conventional ports can create experiences substantially different from standardized mass-market cruising. Research on luxury cruise consumption further demonstrates that luxury value is shaped through the passenger experience rather than through material attributes alone [20].

The significance of this archetype extends beyond the traditional luxury segment. Advances in digital technologies and passenger data may increasingly enable cruise operators to personalise dining, entertainment, wellness, destination activities and other components of the journey according to individual preferences. Premium value may therefore emerge not only from exclusivity, but from the passenger's perception that the cruise experience has been specifically configured around individual needs and expectations.

Toward 2040, the Premium & Individualized archetype may develop along both small-scale and large-scale trajectories. Yacht-style and boutique cruising can provide personalization through exclusivity and high levels of human service, while larger cruise environments may increasingly use technology to provide personalization at scale. The defining characteristic of the archetype is therefore not vessel size, but the degree to which the passenger experiences the cruise as distinctive, flexible and individually relevant.

➤ *Health & Well-Being*

The Health & Well-being archetype is centred on the integration of physical, psychological and emotional well-being into the core value proposition of the cruise experience. While fitness, spa and recreational services have long formed part of conventional cruising, this archetype reflects a broader transition from wellness as an onboard amenity towards well-being as an organising principle of the voyage.

Cruise experience research has already identified wellness value as a distinct component of the value generated through cruise brand experiences [2]. More recent research further demonstrates the increasing relevance of wellness positioning within the cruise sector and distinguishes between different configurations of wellness-oriented cruising [22]. These developments suggest that health and well-being can increasingly shape the overall design and purpose of the cruise experience rather than constitute an additional service category.

Manifestations of this archetype may integrate physical activity, nutrition, sleep and recovery, mindfulness, preventive health practices, nature-based experiences and personalised wellness programmes. Longevity-oriented concepts may extend this logic further by connecting tourism experiences with longer-term aspirations related to healthy ageing and quality of life.

Toward 2040, the Health & Well-being archetype may strengthen the convergence between cruising, hospitality,

wellness and lifestyle services. Its defining value lies not in the presence of individual health-related facilities, but in the extent to which the voyage is intentionally structured around maintaining or enhancing passenger well-being. In this sense, the cruise experience evolves from providing opportunities for relaxation towards becoming a temporary environment for the active pursuit of well-being.

➤ *Community & Shared-Interest*

The Community & Shared-Interest archetype is centred on social connection, belonging and participation in experiences organised around common interests, identities or passions. In this configuration, the value of the cruise derives not only from the activities provided, but also from the opportunity to share them with a temporary community of like-minded travellers.

Themed and event cruises represent clear manifestations of this archetype [24]. Music, gastronomy, sport, culture, hobbies and other specialised interests can become the organising principle of the voyage rather than simply components of onboard entertainment. Passengers may consequently select a cruise not primarily because of its itinerary or vessel, but because of the people, activities and shared interests associated with the experience.

This archetype reflects a broader transition from demographic towards interest- and community-based differentiation. The cruise ship is particularly suited to such experiences because passengers share the same physical and social environment over an extended period, creating repeated opportunities for interaction, collective participation and the formation of temporary communities.

Toward 2040, the Community & Shared-Interest archetype may expand as digital networks enable geographically dispersed individuals with highly specific interests to form communities before, during and after the voyage. The cruise can therefore function as a mobile meeting place in which tourism, events and social participation converge. Its defining value lies not simply in entertainment, but in the sense of connection and belonging generated through shared experience.

➤ *Lifestyle & Living-at-Sea*

The Lifestyle & Living-at-Sea archetype represents the integration of cruising with everyday life rather than its separation as a temporary holiday experience. Its defining value lies in the possibility of combining maritime mobility with living, working, leisure and social interaction over extended periods of time.

Residential and long-stay cruising represent the clearest manifestations of this archetype. As voyage duration extends from days or weeks towards months or potentially longer periods, the vessel can assume functions traditionally associated with everyday living. It may simultaneously operate as a residence, workspace, social environment and mobility platform, progressively blurring the distinction between passenger, tourist and resident.

Broader changes in digital connectivity and location-flexible work further expand the conceptual possibilities of this archetype. Research on digital nomadism demonstrates the increasing convergence of mobility, travel and location-independent work, positioning such practices within broader forms of lifestyle mobility [25]. Reliable connectivity can allow professional activities to continue while travelling, while longer-term onboard communities can transform social interaction from a temporary feature of the tourism experience into part of everyday maritime life.

Toward 2040, the Lifestyle & Living-at-Sea archetype may remain smaller in passenger volume than conventional cruising while nevertheless having considerable conceptual significance. Its development would extend cruise tourism beyond the traditional temporal boundaries of the holiday and towards a form of lifestyle mobility in which residence, work, leisure and travel increasingly converge. Its defining transformation can therefore be expressed as a shift from cruising as an episodic tourism activity towards cruising as a potential way of living.

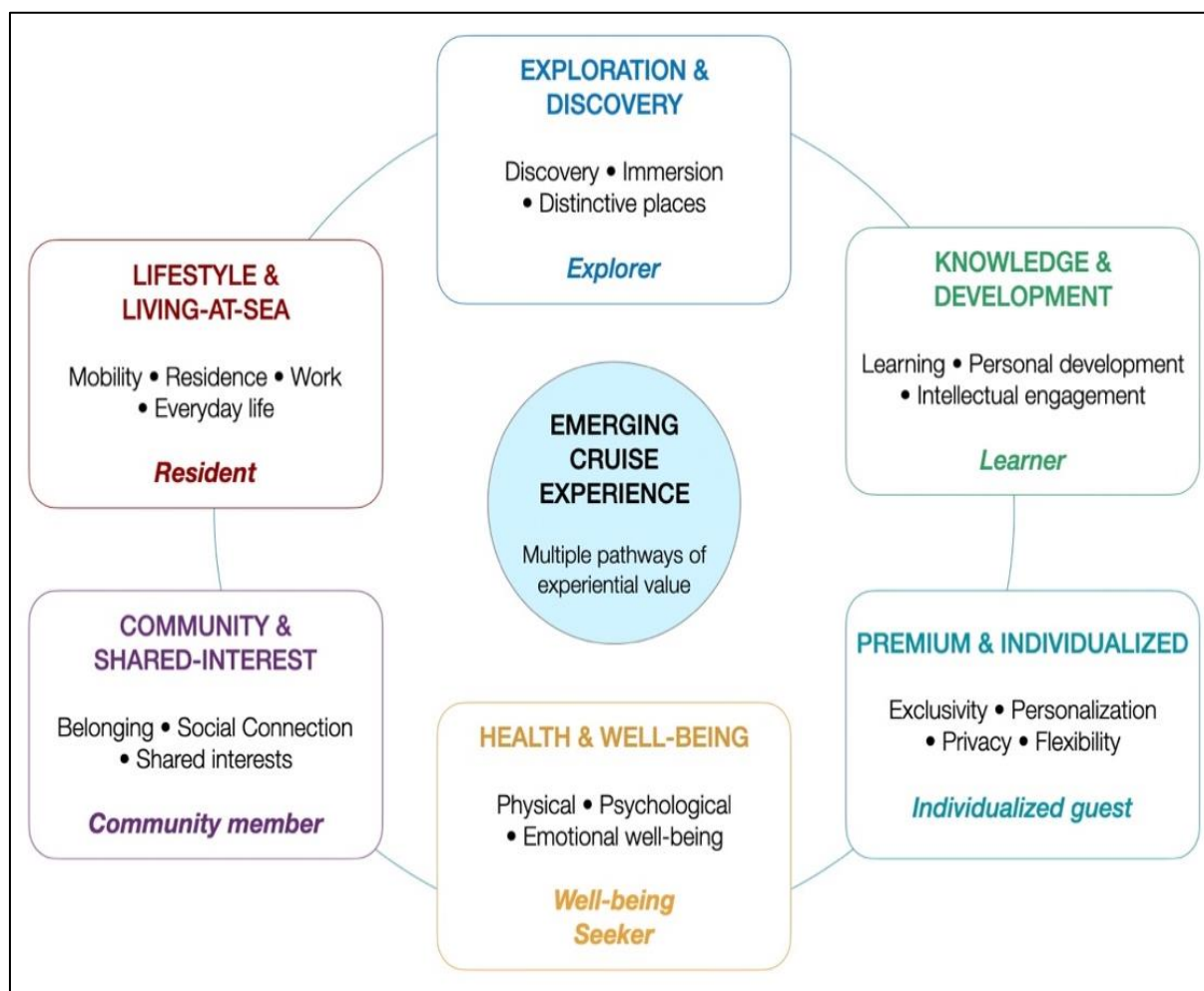


Fig 1 Six Emerging Cruise Experience Archetypes.

VI. CROSS-CUTTING ENABLERS OF FUTURE CRUISE EXPERIENCE

The six archetypes proposed in the preceding section describe different dominant sources of experiential value, but their future development will also depend on forces that operate across multiple cruise configurations. Three such cross-cutting enablers are particularly significant: technology, sustainability and human interaction.

These elements are analytically distinct from the six experience archetypes. They do not define why passengers choose a particular type of cruise experience; rather, they influence how that experience can be designed, delivered and sustained. Technology can enable personalization, connectivity, participation and access to information;

sustainability increasingly shapes the environmental and social conditions under which cruise experiences can develop; and human interaction contributes to service quality, interpretation, trust, social connection and personalized engagement.

The relationship between archetypes and enablers is therefore not one-to-one. Each enabler can influence all six archetypes, although its role and relative importance may differ across them. Likewise, an individual cruise product may combine several archetypes while simultaneously drawing on technological capabilities, sustainability practices and human interaction. This distinction provides the second layer of the proposed Cruise Tourism Futures 2040 Framework.

➤ *Technology as a Cross-Cutting Enabler*

Technology represents a cross-cutting enabler because its influence extends across all six cruise experience archetypes rather than defining a distinct experiential category. The Smart Cruise Ecosystem perspective demonstrates how interconnected digital technologies can support interactions among passengers, operators and other stakeholders while contributing to value creation throughout the cruise journey [3].

Its role varies according to the experiential value being created. Digital tools can enhance exploration through access to contextual and destination information, support interactive learning and scientific participation, enable increasingly individualized services, facilitate personalised wellness experiences, connect communities of shared interest and provide the connectivity required for extended living and working at sea. Technology can therefore reinforce substantially different cruise experiences without determining their underlying purpose.

Toward 2040, its strategic significance may increasingly lie in the capacity to combine scale with differentiation. Data-driven systems, artificial intelligence and connected technologies can potentially allow large and complex cruise environments to respond more dynamically to individual passenger preferences. Technology should therefore be interpreted not as an alternative to the six archetypes, but as an enabling layer through which their experiential value can be expanded, personalised and connected.

➤ *Sustainability as a Cross-Cutting Enabler*

Sustainability represents a cross-cutting condition for the long-term development of all six cruise experience archetypes. Unlike technology, which primarily expands the capabilities through which experiences can be delivered, sustainability defines the environmental, social and economic boundaries within which future cruise tourism can develop. Its role therefore extends beyond operational efficiency to the relationship between cruise activity, destinations, communities and marine environments [5], [15].

The implications differ across the six archetypes. Exploration-oriented experiences depend particularly on the protection of environmentally sensitive destinations, while community- and knowledge-based experiences require meaningful relationships with local stakeholders and responsible forms of participation. Premium, wellness and lifestyle-oriented configurations may similarly need to reconcile increasingly individualized or extended consumption with resource use and environmental impacts. Sustainability therefore influences not only cruise operations, but also the legitimacy and long-term viability of the experiential value being created.

Toward 2040, sustainability is likely to function increasingly as a design principle rather than as an external requirement applied after the cruise product has been developed. Decarbonisation, resource efficiency, destination carrying capacity, community interests and the protection of marine and coastal environments may progressively shape where, how and under what conditions emerging cruise experiences can be offered. In this sense, sustainability enables

future cruise tourism precisely by establishing the conditions under which experiential innovation can remain environmentally and socially viable.

➤ *Human Interaction as a Cross-Cutting Enabler*

Human interaction represents a third cross-cutting enabler of future cruise experience. Despite increasing digitalisation and automation, cruising remains inherently social and service-intensive. Interactions among passengers, crew members, experts, destination communities and other participants can substantially influence how experiential value is created and perceived.

The role of human interaction differs across the six archetypes. Exploration experiences may depend on guides and local interpretation; knowledge-oriented voyages on experts, educators and collaborative participation; premium experiences on personalised human service; and health and well-being experiences on trust, empathy and individual support. Community-oriented cruising depends particularly strongly on interaction among passengers, while lifestyle and living-at-sea configurations may require the development of more enduring onboard social relationships. Research on cruise tourism confirms that guest-to-guest interaction can represent an important dimension of the cruise experience and a potential source of differentiation [23].

Toward 2040, the significance of human interaction may increase rather than diminish as technology assumes a greater role in routine service delivery. Automation can potentially reduce transactional interactions, while simultaneously increasing the relative value of those interactions that require empathy, expertise, interpretation, trust and genuine social connection. Human interaction should therefore be understood not as the opposite of technological development, but as a complementary enabling layer through which future cruise experiences can become more meaningful, relational and socially embedded.

➤ *Tourism Futures 2040 Framework*

The preceding analysis can be integrated into a three-layer conceptual framework for understanding the transformation of cruise tourism toward 2040. The framework connects the forces driving sectoral change with the emerging forms of experiential value through which cruise tourism may increasingly differentiate itself and with the cross-cutting conditions that enable these experiences to develop.

The first layer consists of the transformation drivers identified in Section IV: changing traveller expectations, technological transformation and personalization, sustainability and decarbonisation pressures, demographic and lifestyle change, and the evolving relationship between ships and destinations. These drivers create the pressures and opportunities through which established cruise configurations are being reconsidered.

The second layer comprises the six Emerging Cruise Experience Archetypes: Exploration & Discovery, Knowledge & Development, Premium & Individualized, Health & Well-being, Community & Shared-Interest, and Lifestyle & Living-at-Sea. Rather than representing fixed market segments, the

archetypes identify alternative dominant sources of experiential value around which future cruise products may be configured. Individual cruise products may combine several archetypes, while their relative importance may vary across passenger groups, destinations and market contexts.

The third layer consists of three cross-cutting enablers: technology, sustainability and human interaction. These enablers operate across the archetypes rather than corresponding to individual cruise categories. Technology expands the capabilities through which experiences can be connected and personalised; sustainability establishes the conditions for their long-term environmental and social viability; and human interaction provides the relational,

interpretative and social dimensions through which experiential value can be strengthened.

The Cruise Tourism Futures 2040 Framework therefore conceptualises future cruise tourism as an evolving system in which transformation drivers generate pressures for change, experiential archetypes represent alternative directions of value creation, and cross-cutting enablers shape how these directions can be realised. The framework does not predict which archetype will dominate the cruise market by 2040. Instead, it provides an analytical structure for interpreting how different forms of cruise experience may emerge, overlap and evolve as the boundaries between tourism, mobility, learning, well-being, community and everyday life become increasingly fluid.

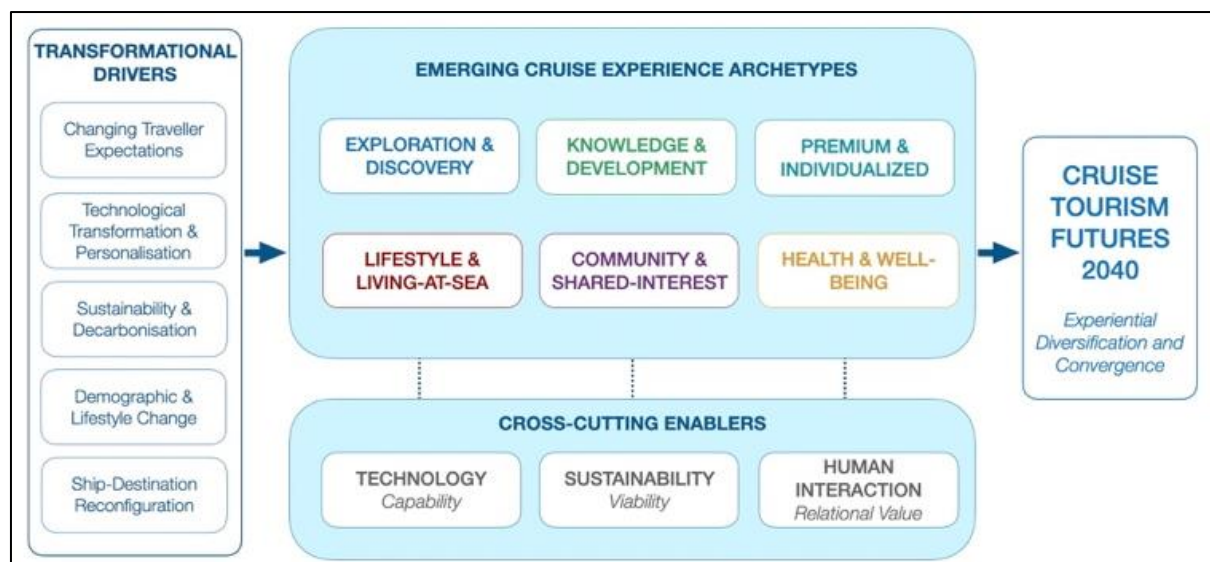


Fig 2 Cruise Tourism Futures 2040 Framework

VII. DISCUSSION

The proposed framework suggests that the transformation of cruise tourism toward 2040 is unlikely to be characterised by the emergence of a single dominant cruise model. Instead, diversification may increasingly occur through different configurations of experiential value. The six archetypes identified in this study—Exploration & Discovery, Knowledge & Development, Premium & Individualized, Health & Well-being, Community & Shared-Interest, and Lifestyle & Living-at-Sea—illustrate how cruising may progressively extend beyond its conventional combination of transportation, accommodation and leisure.

A central theoretical implication is the shift from product-based classification towards experience-based conceptualisation. Existing cruise configurations are commonly distinguished through vessel characteristics, itinerary structures, destination regions or market segments. The archetype approach proposed here instead differentiates emerging cruise experiences according to their dominant source of passenger value. This distinction allows expedition, scientific, wellness, themed, residential and other emerging configurations to be interpreted as manifestations of broader experiential logics rather than as isolated future cruise categories. It also recognises that individual cruise products may combine several archetypes simultaneously.

A second implication concerns the relationship between experiential differentiation and the conditions through which it can be realised. Technology, sustainability and human interaction are not treated as separate future cruise models, but as cross-cutting enablers whose influence extends across the six archetypes. This distinction is particularly important because future cruise innovation is unlikely to result from technological development alone. Digital capabilities may enable personalization, connectivity and participation, but the long-term viability of emerging experiences will also depend on environmental and social sustainability, while their perceived value may continue to rely strongly on human expertise, service and social interaction.

From a managerial perspective, the framework suggests that future cruise development may benefit from beginning with the experiential value sought by particular passenger groups rather than with the addition of individual onboard features. Cruise operators can use the archetypes to consider alternative directions for product differentiation, while destinations and other stakeholders can assess how emerging cruise experiences correspond with local resources, community interests and environmental constraints. The framework may therefore support both product-development and destination-management discussions concerning the future diversification of cruise tourism.

The study is conceptual and future-oriented and consequently has several limitations. The six archetypes represent an interpretative synthesis of the literature rather than an empirically validated taxonomy, and their boundaries are intentionally permeable. Moreover, the evidence base is uneven across emerging cruise configurations, with some forms considerably more established than others. Future research should therefore empirically examine the relevance and distinctiveness of the proposed archetypes through expert assessment, passenger research, scenario analysis or other prospective methods.

Particular attention should also be given to how different archetypes combine in practice and whether their relative importance varies across passenger segments, geographical regions and cruise market contexts.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Cruise tourism is entering a period of transformation in which future competitiveness may depend increasingly on the ability to create differentiated and meaningful experiences rather than on expanding the conventional cruise product alone. Changing traveller expectations, technological development, sustainability pressures, demographic and lifestyle shifts, and evolving relationships between ships and destinations are collectively reshaping the context in which cruise tourism develops.

This study proposes the Cruise Tourism Futures 2040 Framework as a conceptual structure for interpreting these changes. Its central contribution is the identification of six Emerging Cruise Experience Archetypes based on dominant experiential value rather than vessel type, itinerary structure or established market segment. Exploration & Discovery, Knowledge & Development, Premium & Individualized, Health & Well-being, Community & Shared-Interest, and Lifestyle & Living-at-Sea represent alternative but potentially overlapping directions through which future cruise experiences may be configured.

The framework further distinguishes these experiential directions from three cross-cutting enablers—technology, sustainability and human interaction. Their interaction suggests that the future of cruising should not be understood solely through technological innovation or new product formats, but through the capacity to combine technological capability, long-term environmental and social viability, and meaningful human engagement in the creation of passenger value.

Rather than predicting a single future for the cruise sector, the framework highlights a process of increasing diversification and convergence. Cruising may progressively intersect with exploration, learning, well-being, community, work and everyday life, extending its role beyond that of a conventional holiday product. The Cruise Tourism Futures 2040 Framework therefore provides a basis for interpreting emerging directions in cruise tourism and for future empirical research examining how these experiential archetypes develop, combine and vary across markets and passenger groups.

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