

Jalesh Launches **Luxury** on the High Seas



Dr Subhash Chandra with the Director General of Shipping, Amitabh Kumar & the Commissioner of Police (Mumbai), Sanjay Barve

To cater to the desires of those who want to have a unique vacation in the form of a short cruise, Jalesh Cruises has launched MS Karnika, which had its maiden voyage in April with 2,000 passengers enjoying the best in entertainment, cuisine, shopping, and sightseeing. Maritime Matrix Today was an exclusive media entity on May 3 to provide a first-hand report.



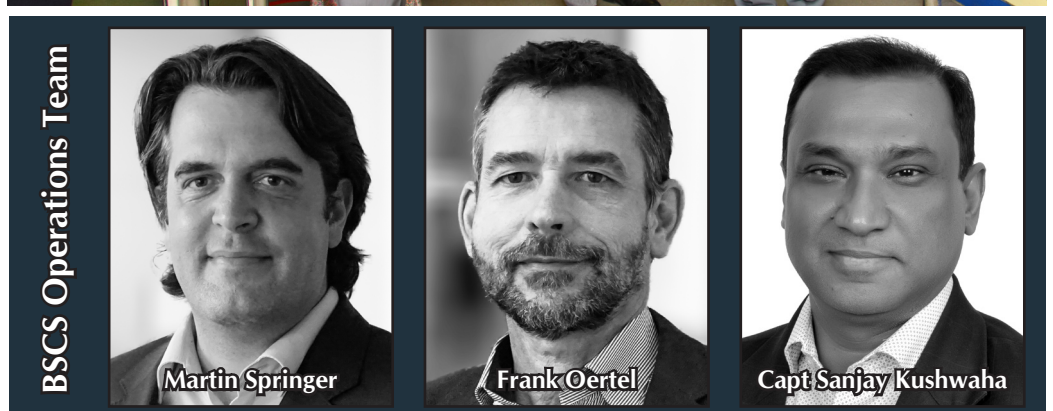
Jurgen Bailom



Mr Chandra



Les Royle



BSCS Operations Team

Martin Springer

Frank Oertel

Capt Sanjay Kushwaha

On April 19, 2019, Jalesh Cruises, India's first premium cruise service catering to the Indian domestic and international cruise business, christened 'MS Karnika' in an official naming ceremony in Mumbai. Shreyasi Goenka took on the mantle of the 'godmother' of the magnificent liner. A special postal stamp of INR 5 was also released on the occasion to commemorate the historic occasion on Indian waters.

Karnika has been named after a celestial nymph who, according to Indian mythology emerged when gods and demons churned the ocean for 'amrit', the elixir for life. Apsara Karnika, a celestial maiden, stood for exquisite beauty and alluring charm for carrying treasures and pleasures to reward and indulge those engaged in hard labour. The name also reflects a true Indian identity, drawing inspiration from

the first Indian 'ghat' — Manikarnika in Varanasi, believed to be the oldest existing city in India.

The traditional cracking of a champagne bottle on the bow of the ship followed the blessing. The naming ceremony is a maritime practice and is considered a good luck charm for the captain, crew and passengers sailing the ship. Speaking on the occasion, Jurgen Bailom, President and CEO, Jalesh Cruises, said, "Jalesh Cruises is immensely proud to give India its first premium ship Karnika, which has been curated to indulge and entertain in true Indian style. She is a beautiful ship designed to enthrall both domestic and international guests with the famed Indian hospitality. Our ship will make it possible for Indians to experience cruise vacations closer home with high level of customization that touches the sensibilities of people here."



Mr Bailom with Capt Sankalp Shukla & Capt Sanjeev Sharma of Bernhard Schulte



The Indian cruise business has been conceptualised by experienced cruise veteran Bailom, who has spent the past 12 months developing the onboard cruise product that includes unique entertainment formats, itineraries and shore excursion programmes. The naming ceremony was followed by bespoke entertainment performances. The 70,285-ton ship sailed on its maiden voyage from Mumbai to Goa on April 17 carrying 2,000 passengers.

Onboard, passengers will have a variety of cuisines, entertainment, adventure and relaxation to choose from. Additionally, the cruise offers land-based excursions at different ports for passengers. The ship has three fine dining restaurants, which includes Indian cuisine at Waterfront and Chef's Table and Thai, Malay, Korean, Mongolian, Taiwanese and Japanese cuisines at Chopstix. The ship also hosts nine different buffet and food stations offering a variety of delicacies ranging from street food, barbeque, international grill to patisserie and frozen desserts. The ship also has dedicated cuisine for Jain passengers. There are nine bars on the ship to offer a full range of international premium spirits.



Karnika provides a host of onboard entertainment for children as well as adults. The ship will offer Broadway shows, burlesque performances, casino, music and dance nights, movie screenings and adventure activities, among others. The ship offers features that make it convenient and easy for senior citizens and differently-abled passengers to enjoy the cruise. It is also the first Indian ship to provide therapeutic relaxation facilities on the high seas. Theon Spa offers a host of aromatic and natural techniques for relaxation. A state-of-the-art fitness studio and multi-purpose salon facilities are also available to passengers. The ship has high-end retail therapy for guests to take home duty-free products from a host of prominent international brands. The ship is also equipped with the state-of-the-art venue, modern technology and 24x7 internet access.



Speaking at the naming ceremony, Dr Subhash Chandra, Chairman, Zee and Essel Group, said that just like Zee kick-started the satellite TV industry in India, Jalesh will create a cruise industry that could employ 5 million people. He also termed the launch of the cruise service a new chapter in the transportation and tourism sectors of India while reflecting on the way the entertainment preferences of Indians have evolved over the decades. "When our amusement theme



park EsselWorld was launched, we realised that the Indian market does need entertainment but within their houses and thus Zee was born. After 26 years, people now also want entertainment away from home and that is what has led to the birth of Jalesh," he said.

Bernhard Schulte Cruise Services (BSCS) has been awarded technical management of MS Karnika. Les Royle, BSCS President and Martin Springer, Managing Director worked closely with Jalesh Cruises on the new partnership. "We are very proud and excited to welcome this fine vessel into BSCS' management, and being part of the first dedicated, domestic cruise operation on the Indian sub-continent and the Middle East" said Royle.

Built for Sitmar Cruises in 1989 by Fincantieri in Italy, Karnika started life as Crown Princess and was transferred to P&O Princess Cruises after the latter organisation acquired Sitmar. She was acquired in 2003 by Carnival Corporation, and sailed as the Pacific Jewel for a decade between 2009 and 2019, before being purchased by Zen Cruises.

Meanwhile, the christening ceremony also served as an occasion to celebrate the achievements of five Indians who have made the country proud in the global arena by being the first ones to achieve pinnacle in their fields. The personalities included Milkha Singh, first Indian athlete to win a Gold at Commonwealth Games (1958); Dr Subhash Chandra, the pioneer of private satellite television channel and entertainment park; actor Sushmita Sen, the first Indian Miss Universe (1994); Mahesh Bhupati, first Indian to win the Grand Slam Tournament (1997); and Mary Kom, the first Indian woman boxer to win Asian Games (2014).

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"I think cruising is a beautiful experience"

With his very rich international experience in the cruising sector, J urgen Bailom has been chosen to head Jalesh Cruises as its President and CEO. In this interview, he elaborates about how he will make cruising aboard the Karnika a wonderful experience for all its passengers.

What drove you to choose and accept an offer from Jalesh Cruises?

It was the simplicity and yet the grandeur of Dr Subhash Chandra's vision that beguiled me. When I asked Dr Chandra, Chairman, Zee and Essel Group, what he wanted to achieve with starting a cruise line in India he told me two things — one that he wanted happy people and the other that he wanted a lot of smiling faces. These lines that he said were very significant and when I heard them, I was sure I wanted to helm India's first cruise line. This is a fascinating opportunity for me for a country with 1.3 billion people, 7,300 km of beautiful coastline, and over a 5,000-year-old history. The opportunities are tremendous and our aim is to give Indians a lovely and memorable vacation that will put smiles on their faces.

How will this translate into a good business prospect considering India's long coastlines?

India has 7,300 km of beautiful coastline hemmed with historical as well as metropolitan cities that have much to offer to tourists. What is equally exciting is the vast range of cuisines every culture has to offer, which is so distinct from each other. The experience of cruising along the coastline and on shore excursions can be quite fulfilling for tourists, especially younger tourists who are always looking for new places to visit, and different things to do.

How do you plan to create awareness about cruise culture among Indians?

Indians are already known for being cruise lovers. In fact, among Asians they are the second-largest cruise passengers, after China. So, in that sense, a lot of them are already aspirational and are acquainted with the cruising culture. What we really want to do is create the same sense of aspiration among Indians to cruise in India. Our maiden product, Karnika, which is India's first premium cruise ship, is a step in this direction. We have created a product that is for India. We want to help Indians experience the comfort of their home away from their home when they cruise. Jalesh Cruises will offer international hospitality on the high sea without the hassles of visas and passports.

We will sail to locations abroad but we are ensuring that the procedure for visas is streamlined and through a single window to make it easy for Indians to plan a cruise holiday. Our offerings have been designed keeping in mind the preferences of Indians. For instance, the food includes a host of Indian cuisines, including Jain food. This is important as a lot of vegetarians, especially Jain tourists, do experience trouble during vacations since they hardly find food that suits their sensibilities. Similarly, the spa offerings are keeping in mind Indian elements and techniques of relaxation. Our products promise to infuse the culture of cruising in India in a very short span of time.

Jalesh Cruises is also committed to creating a valuable workplace for its crew

and staff. We are creating a lot of jobs as a significant number of our staff and crew is Indian. Working with Jalesh Cruises will give them an exposure to the complexities of the industry and give them a chance to train for international hospitality. Our Indian employees will also have a chance to work along with international crew, thereby providing a healthy exchange of ideas and nuances of different markets.

Could you elaborate about the process of transformation from Pacific Jewel to Karnika?

Karnika was erstwhile called Pacific Jewel when she was with P&O Australia. She was built in 1990 at Fincantieri, Italy at a state-of-art facility. The vessel has undergone several refurbishments in the past and belongs to Lloyd's Register Class, which indicates that her maintenance is of the highest standard. Post her purchase by Jalesh Cruises, the 70,285-ton ship underwent an extensive refurbishment in the Sembcorp Marine Admiralty Yard, which is a fully functional deep-drafted dry dock ideal for refurbishment of mega-size cruise vessels. The cruise ships of Royal Caribbean, Carnival Cruises and Star Cruises have also undergone refurbishment at this place in the past.

The overhaul was undertaken keeping in mind the preferences of Indian passengers. As part of the renovation, the casino was rebuilt to provide card games appreciated by Indians. The kids' play area was redone and a spray park area was built along with two swimming pools. Given the preference for multi-cuisines by Indians, the restaurants were revamped to offer a variety of gourmet meals.

What's your plan to maximise Jalesh Cruises' return on investment?

The premise of our business is to make people happy. Everything that we do or offer will have people at

the heart of it, be it guests, staff and crew, or our sales business partners. Our focus is to provide a memorable vacation to our guests, a dignified workplace for our employees, and trusting customers for our SBPs. Ensuring that each of our stakeholders is overwhelmingly satisfied with our service will help us achieve our targets and thus bring desired returns. Another critical aspect for us is to help build the domestic cruise industry. We are working very closely with the Government of India to ensure that the potential of the industry is maximised and that sector-friendly policies are implemented to attract more cruise lines.

Also, as stated earlier, our product is truly Indian. We have ensured that every Indian passenger feels completely at home even as she or he experiences international hospitality. We see a lot of potential and interest from group holidays, destination weddings, corporate off-sites, MICE that can be enjoyed through our cruise line. Weddings especially are a key focus area given the trend of destination weddings these days. Karnika is fully equipped to handle a big fat Indian wedding in the 'desi' style complete with the tradition of 'phasas' around the 'havan kund'.

After your decades of experience in the cruising sector, how would you describe cruise ships, cruising and cruise passengers?

I think cruising is a beautiful experience and cruise ships are floating islands of joys that take you around the world to experience new places, cultures, cuisines, and meet new people. Cruise passengers are evolved tourists who still want to explore new ways of vacationing. In the days to come, cruise tourism will see a phenomenal growth across the world, especially in India as the market opens up and more ships call port in the country. As for Jalesh Cruises, we will be remembered as the pioneers in creating cruise tourism in India for Indians.

"Indian nationals like to cruise"

With the technical management of Karnika now being the responsibility of Bernhard Schulte Cruise Services, Les Royle, President, BSCS, provides an insight into what this will entail.

Now that BSCS has been awarded a contract for the technical management of Karnika, could you share details regarding this India-specific deal?

BSCS first had contact with Jalesh Cruises late in 2018 when we outlined our goals and also advised of our long and significant presence in India. Our approach from the outset was to be as proactive as possible and also to provide guidance where and when required. We liked the strategy as outlined by the company and believe



they are on the right track for cruising within and out of India. Jalesh Cruises is providing what India has not had up to now — its own domestic cruise operation, showcasing Indian cuisine and a unique entertainment format, all targeted to an Indian audience. For the first time, Indian nationals can cruise out of an Indian port on an Indian-owned ship.

What are your views in relation to the cruise business in India and Indians contributing to the cruise industry?

Indian nationals like to cruise. They have an appetite to explore and to mix with other cultures and nationalities. Many travel to Singapore and also Miami to take cruises proving that distance is no barrier to them. I believe, like other nationalities, Indians see the value proposition that a cruise vacation can provide, especially for young families, where the kids have just as much a fun time as the adults.

What has been BSCS' contribution to the launch of Jalesh Cruises?

BSCS worked closely with the management of Jalesh Cruises and other appointed service providers to ensure a smooth handover of the vessel from its previous owners. We then took the vessel through a brief dry dock period and brought it into service, culminating in the official inaugural voyage from Mumbai. There have been many firsts with Karnika's introduction, including the appointment of an Indian captain to master the vessel.

What are your long-term plans for India?

The Bernhard Schulte Group has a long history of doing business with India. We have offices in Mumbai for ship management and also recruitment of seafarers. We also have a significant presence in Cochin, employing some 300 professional IT personnel for our wholly owned subsidiary, MariApps. With the introduction of BSCS and establishing an office here, we see our long history of presence within the country growing exponentially.

The cruise sector is probably the most demanding markets in the maritime world. What is BSCS' strategy to tackle this aspect?

From the outset, BSCS has availed itself of the in-house knowledge and expertise available within the group. This has made our entry into the cruise sector much smoother than if we had set out on our own. Bernhard Schulte as a company has been in existence for over 130 years and is still family-owned. Being part of that family structure means we have had access to many years of maritime experience and also contacts with class societies, flag states, etc. This allows BSCS to offer a comprehensive management strategy to a client, large or small. All are treated as equals and receive a service based on the core credo of the group — transparency, honesty, and a professional approach to technical management.

Could you elaborate about BSCS' growth graph and contributions in different areas ever since it was founded?

BSCS was officially formed in January 2018, but already has five significant cruise vessels in management. We believe our rapid growth has been in part because of the Schulte Group's established standing within the maritime sector. Also, our core credo values have contributed a lot to our success. We anticipate our growth pattern to continue with more ships coming into management over the next six months to one year. Again, we believe our transparent and honest approach to clients is the underlying factor and will be so as BSCS looks to supply the best possible technical management within the cruise industry.

In December last year, Bernhard Schulte acquired a majority stake in YPI Crew, based in France. This was an acquisition based on our strategic thinking that yacht recruitment in many ways is similar to the process required for cruise ship recruitment. With the many expedition and yacht-style vessels expected to enter the market over the next years, we can offer yacht-experienced personnel to help the client enhance that yacht-style factor for their passengers.

"I have positive solutions for every challenge"

As the captain of a cruise ship, it is not just the safe navigation of the vessel that matters. With a huge crew onboard along with thousands of passengers, the role calls for deep understanding of the human nature and exceptional leadership qualities. Captain Firoze Pasha, who has been chosen to command Karnika, provides more insights.

Could you describe your experience as a marine pilot versus a cruise captain? What is the difference between the two?

I had been working on a cruise vessel since 2002 and was also commanding



cruise vessels in 2011 and 2012. Thereafter I was working as nautical trainer and instructor at the Maritime Training Centre in Hamburg, Germany for advance marine simulations for Hamburg pilots, keel canal pilots and river pilots. I did my MBA (Shipping) from Hamburg School of Business Administration. My most recent job was with Bernhard Schulte Cruise Services as senior marine superintendent and company security officer for port operations in their Hamburg office. As a marine pilot at Kandla Port and Maersk Terminal Pipavav Port from 2015 to 2017, I was able to refine my skills for ship manoeuvring under strong tidal and weather conditions. As a marine pilot I was doing 7-8 ship movements a day and as a master on the cruise vessel I do one arrival and departure almost every day.

A marine pilot is a local port expert and highly trained with the skills to handle all types and sizes of ships while as a master of a cruise vessel it is the safe, secure and economical running of the cruise ship and taking care of large number of crew that matters — typically 720 crew members from 21 different nationalities. A marine pilot acts as advisor for the master and assists and supports in the execution of safe arrival and berthing and departure of the vessel. As cruise ship master, I take the legal responsibility of 722 crew and 2,054 guests and ensure the ship is safe all the time and complies with all the statutory and mandatory maritime regulations.

Which is your favourite Karnika itinerary and why?

As of now all the itineraries are my favourites and I have made myself and my entire team flexible towards making any itinerary safe and provide an excellent experience for our guests onboard the Karnika.

What made you opt for Jalesh Cruises?

Since I was already working with BSCS, it seemed a natural thing to take up the offer given by Jalesh Cruises. Also, this will provide a great experience because the project is a major turning event in the Indian cruise industry – a new chapter in the Indian maritime history. Also, I was much impressed with the thoughts and philosophies of Dr Subhash Chandra.

As the ship's master, how do you face the many challenges that come your way?

As the master of a cruise vessel I try to train my mind to see good in everything. Positivity is a choice and the happiness of my life depends on the quality of my thoughts. Therefore, my personal mantra is that I have only constructive and positive solutions for every challenge I come across.

Could you elaborate on your relationship with BSCS?

The Bernhard Schulte Group believes in transparency in business and uncompromising marine standards for safety, security and pollution prevention. BSCS has an extremely high retention rate of its employees and considers its floating staff as human assets, taking care of them in every aspect. As Sir Richard Branson has said, if you take care of your employees they will take care of your customers, and as a sailing master I observe the practical execution of this concept on the Karnika from the BSCS side.

How important is training and education for the cruise sector?

Cruise ship procedures and protocols are entirely different from other merchant ships. The ranks onboard are also entirely different. For the enhancement of safety of navigation on a cruise ship we follow the navigator and co-navigator approach and deploy the latest standards of marine resource management and human element leadership with close loop communication at all levels. On cruise vessels the captain and staff captain drive the vessel by themselves and so training is certainly a basic requirement with intensive command assessment and continual assessments on an annual basis.

What's your take about women in the cruise sector?

It's very important to have women participation in all fields, including the mercantile marine cruise industry. I have a dream to have the first Indian lady chief engineer and lady captain aboard cruise ships. I am in strong favour to give more opportunities to lady technical officers, including chief electricians, electronic engineers, IT officers, AC engineers and hotel service engineers aboard cruise ships.

