Saga Cruise Survey FAQs

Taking part in an ORCA Saga Cruise Survey is a rewarding opportunity to collect valuable data while engaging with guests and representing ORCA at sea. However, Saga Cruise Surveys differ significantly from our ferry surveys and require a greater commitment in terms of survey effort, public engagement, teamwork, and time spent onboard.

This document has been created to answer some of the most common questions we receive from Saga Cruise Survey applicants. We strongly encourage you to read through all of the information below before applying, as it will help you understand what to expect from life onboard and the responsibilities involved in the role.

As a member of an ORCA team onboard, you will be expected to contribute positively not only to data collection, but also to guest engagement activities, presentations, wildlife clinics, creation of daily slides and other onboard duties. Successful applicants are enthusiastic, professional, adaptable, and comfortable working as part of a close-knit team in a unique environment.

We hope this FAQ helps you decide whether a Saga Cruise Survey is the right next step in your ORCA surveying journey. If you have any further questions after reading this document, please contact the ORCA team at survey@orca.org.uk.

1. Do I need to be an Experienced Surveyor to apply for a Saga Cruise Survey?

Yes. To apply for a Saga Cruise Survey, you must have completed **at least** three ORCA ferry surveys.

Saga Cruise Surveys are significantly longer than our ferry surveys and require surveyors to be comfortable living and working at sea for extended periods. Applicants must also have a thorough understanding of the ORCA Survey Protocol and be confident carrying out both distance sampling surveys from the bridge, as well as OceanWatchers surveys on deck.

If you are an Experienced Surveyor but have not yet completed an overnight ferry survey, we strongly recommend doing so before applying. This will help you gain experience of multi-day surveys, cabin sharing and the stamina required for a longer cruise itinerary.

2. Are we guests on board or part of the crew?

ORCA team members are neither paying guests nor crew members. Instead, we are onboard as guest lecturers and wildlife specialists.

While onboard, you are representing ORCA and should conduct yourself professionally at all times. As you are not a paying guest, you may not have access to all the same privileges or activities available to passengers.

3. Can I go ashore on port days?

Yes. Port Days provide an important opportunity to rest and recharge between Sea Days, and team members are welcome to go ashore. Port Days should also be used by the team to rest, and in some circumstances you may be required to stay on board to assist with other team activities, tasks or admin.

Please follow any instructions given by your Team Leader regarding time ashore and team commitments on Port Days.

4. What will our surveying hours be?

Saga Cruise Surveys involve long and busy working days, particularly during Sea Days.

Depending on daylight hours, survey teams may begin as early as 05:00 and finish around 20:00. Team Leaders will ensure that the team receives appropriate breaks throughout the day, including time for meals and comfort breaks. In addition to surveying, team members are expected to participate in guest engagement activities, presentations, wildlife clinics, quizzes, and evening dining with guests.

On Port Days, surveying may take place during arrival into and departure from port, which can also require early starts and late finishes.

Applicants should be prepared for long periods standing on deck, surveying from the bridge, and delivering public engagement activities. A good level of fitness and stamina is essential.

5. Can I have my own cabin onboard?

No. Team members will share a cabin with another surveyor of the same sex.

If you have applied with a friend or partner, we cannot guarantee that you will be allocated the same cabin, as cabin arrangements depend on the overall composition of the team.

We recommend bringing earplugs and ensuring that you are comfortable with shared accommodation before applying. Completing an overnight ferry survey beforehand is essential to gain this experience.

6. Is the cost of my food and cabin covered?

Yes. Your accommodation and meals are provided for the duration of the cruise.

Surveyors are responsible for:

- Travel to and from the embarkation and disembarkation ports
- Personal travel insurance covering the entire cruise duration
- Any personal expenses incurred onboard or ashore

7. Will I need to deliver presentations onboard?

Yes. While the Wildlife Officer is primarily responsible for delivering formal presentations, all team members may be asked to support or deliver presentations if required.

The entire team is expected to contribute to guest engagement activities, including:

- Wildlife clinics
- Deck talks (musters) and wildlife spotting sessions
- Quizzes and other guest activities
- Creation of daily slides and presentations using PowerPoint
- Hosting tables/dining with guests

Applicants should therefore be confident speaking to groups, positively engaging with guests, and using PowerPoint to produce professional daily slides and presentations.

8. Will I need to run deck watches on my own?

Yes. As part of bridge distance sampling surveys, three team members may be assigned to the bridge while the fourth remains on deck conducting a deck watch and engaging with guests.

This role involves answering questions, pointing out sightings, and delivering wildlife information to guests to enhance their experience on board and enthuse them about ORCA and the marine environment.

Support will be provided, particularly on your first Saga Cruise Survey, but all applicants should feel confident communicating effectively and positively with guests and working independently when required. The responsibility for deck watches is shared across the team, so everyone should have a good knowledge of ORCA and the marine mammals, seabirds, and other wildlife likely to be encountered during the voyage.

9. Will I be required to take part in bridge distance sampling surveys?

Yes. Participation in bridge distance sampling surveys is a core part of the surveyor role on Saga Cruise Surveys.

All team members are expected to contribute to these surveys and must therefore have a thorough understanding of the ORCA Survey Protocol. Applicants should also have participated in an ORCA ferry survey within the 12 months prior to departure to ensure their survey skills remain up-to-date.

10. What happens if the weather is too bad to survey?

If weather conditions make surveying unsafe or unsuitable, the team will focus on delivering additional indoor activities for guests. This may include wildlife talks, quizzes, clinics, presentations, or other educational engagement activities.

As ORCA team members are onboard in a professional capacity, they are expected to remain available for ORCA duties during these periods rather than participating in daytime guest activities (such as attending lectures or crafting activities). Evening entertainment may be attended once guests have been accommodated and all team responsibilities have been completed.

11. What makes a strong Saga Cruise Survey applicant?

Successful applicants are typically confident surveyors who are comfortable working long hours at sea, engaging positively and effectively with members of the public, and representing ORCA professionally. Strong communication skills, positivity, enthusiasm for wildlife, teamwork, adaptability, ability to engage positively will people from all walks of life, and a willingness to contribute to all aspects of life onboard are essential for a successful cruise experience.