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As the cruise industry's first official one, he's not surprised. But the newly created role is key for Royal Caribbean. Based in the cruise line's Miami headquarters, a seasoned meteorologist has a lot to offer ship captains—as well as guests and crew, no matter where they are. "We have ships sailing all over the world, and they face different weather conditions every day," says Michael Bayley, Royal Caribbean's President and CEO. "You have to keep an eye on the weather systems at all times. And with more than 20 years of experience, Jim is an expert we're excited to have on our team." Every day, Van Fleet is tracking the position of Royal Caribbean's ships along with the weather, while staying in touch with their captains, the company's executives and the rest of the marine operations team. It's a 24/7 job—but he wouldn't have it any other way. Van Fleet has racked up 20 plus years of experience as a meteorologist in television, covering an array of locations from Texas to Florida. The move to bring his expertise to Royal Caribbean may seem unusual, but to him, its purpose is clear. "I bring yet another added layer of safety at corporate for anyone in the world, at any time," Van Fleet says. "And it makes the team here that much more diverse and strong." Given his longstanding broadcast work where he regularly was in touch with viewers, he's in an ideal position not only to assess the weather for our ships as they sail—but to translate all of it for guests. With hurricane season up ahead for the southeast U.S. and Caribbean, it's an important time to share with guests just what may happen if a storm develops while they're on their cruise, and a skilled meteorologist like Jim is perfect to help explain: With that in mind, Van Fleet shared with us his top intel that he wants guests to know: When It Comes To Hurricanes, There Are Few Surprises "With hurricanes, we have a lot of time to forecast and set them coming; none of that just develops and surprises us. Where it could get tricky is that they often hit in areas where we have large clusters of ships. You're not just rerouting one ship or altering people's itineraries—it's multiple ships, multiple itineraries, and multiple [thousands] of guests." Safety And Comfort Come First "Safety-wise, we do everything in our power to never have a ship in harm's way," Van Fleet says. The brack of a ship, he adds, is that it can move—unlike luxury hotels or destinations. If a hurricane or other severe weather hits while you're cruising, Van Fleet and the marine operations team are assessing when it will arrive, how severe it may be, how to maneuver the ship to avoid it—and, if necessary, whether they need to change course altogether. The Logistics Would Surprise You When a storm is approaching, Van Fleet, the captain and the marine operations team also have to consider things like whether the operation will hit a port your ship is scheduled to visit. If severe weather hits while you're at sea, they think about whether you're spending time outdoors on the ship's open decks, or if there's an outdoor performance scheduled in the AquaTheater. Rerouting is even more complex: canceling a port visit can affect guests' flights and travel plans, and even have implications for restocking inventory on our ships. There is a Plan B And C That said, the team always has several options they can consider. Once they feel confident in the forecast, they evaluate if the ship can get ahead of it by speeding up, slowing down—or rerouting. If a move is needed, then Royal Caribbean maps out where the ship will go instead. "In these scenarios, the company will try to find something comparable to your original itinerary," Van Fleet says, noting that you would be reimbursed for any planned Royal Caribbean shore excursions, too. On board, staff will be clear and consistent in communicating with guests what the process is and how they may be affected. We Never Forget It's Your Vacation "The ships are built to be durable and designed to withstand a wide array of scenarios, but there's a bigger goal in this process," Van Fleet says. "We never forget that you've invested your money to spend your vacation with us, and we want to make sure we get it right—and that it's the best it can be." He keeps it top of mind every day. "I don't forecast for what the ships can handle; I forecast for what will be your best vacation experience." With Jim's extensive experience as a meteorologist, having him on call will be a major asset for Royal Caribbean's captains, and most importantly for you and your cruise vacation. No matter where your ship is headed, whether cruising the Caribbean or the coast of Australia, you can feel at ease knowing Jim is working with the team to ensure your safety and comfort every day. Imagine a getaway that combines the best of every vacation. Think: The beach retreat, the resort escape, the theme park adventure and more—all in one getaway. Enter Icon of the Seas. For the first time, adults and kids alike, as well as all types of travelers—whether you prefer thrill or chill—will have ways to make memories together and on their own terms. And with a new ship comes a new captain: Meet Captain Henrik Loy. Born and raised in Bergen, Norway, this captain has had a taste for life at sea for as long as he can remember. "Bergen is a popular cruise destination and also the gateway to the Norwegian fjords," he said. "I was always fascinated by ships and decided to become a seafarer. I started out as a cadet and moved up through the ranks on many different ships all over the world." Henrik joined Royal Caribbean more than 25 years ago in 1997. While it may seem like he's seen and done it all, he's about to embark on the adventure of a lifetime when he takes the wheel and sets course for the Caribbean from Miami in January 2024. Ahead of setting sail next year, Captain Henrik shared the firsts and favorites he's looking forward to experiencing on Icon, as well as tips on where to start when you join him and the team on board: Captain Henrik Loy marks more than 25 years at Royal Caribbean as the first captain of the cruise line's brand-new ship.Credit: Royal Caribbean "Icon of the Seas is a completely new class of ship with many new features and innovations," Henrik said. "I am working hard to learn it all." However, he's anything but fazed by the challenge: "I climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro, and at the summit, I thought, 'If I can do this, I can do anything.'" In fact, Captain Henrik's been visiting Icon while it's under construction in the Meyer Turku shipyard in Turku, Finland. He's been working with the team on the ground to see that inspections, training, tests and prep for key moments in the construction process go smoothly. One such key moment that's coming up is sea trials. That's when a ship, Icon in this case, is pushed to its limits in a series of performance tests that include the engines, navigation systems, propulsion and more. Icon features eight signature neighborhoods, like The Hideaway and Thrill Island. Each one's home to a lineup of restaurants, bars, entertainment and activities.Credit: Royal Caribbean When Henrik says he's working hard to learn it all, he means never-before-seen experiences, reimaged favorites and new features like the liquefied natural gas (aka LNG, the cleanest-burning marine fuel to date) tanks on the ship. There's a lot to cover between the new adventures and engineering feats. The best part is that whatever your travel style and personality, you have ways to make the most of your vacation thanks to eight signature neighborhoods. And by neighborhoods, we're talking destinations in and of themselves that each feature your choice of restaurants, entertainment and activities, bars, shopping and more. Find a pool for every mood and day of the week on Icon, including the largest pool at sea and the first suspended infinity pool at sea.Credit: Royal Caribbean Are you a thrill-seeker? Look no further than adventures like six-recessed waterslides, rock climbing and the FlowRider surf simulator to start. Or if you're all about kicking back, there's a slice of paradise for you across seven pools—that's one for every day of the week—including the largest pool at sea and the ultimate beach club experience with the first suspended infinity pool on a cruise ship at The Hideaway. From Thrill Island to the first neighborhood designed for young families from end to end (more on that later), the variety of neighborhoods on Icon is matched with just as many flavors at more than 40 spots to dine and drink. That includes 15 bars and entertainment venues where you can have your best day ever and the best night ever, too. A next-level AquaTheater and 55-foot-tall waterfall are at the center of the first AquaDome, a transformational neighborhood that sits at the top of the new ship.Credit: Royal Caribbean "I am honored and excited to be the captain of Icon of the Seas," Henrik said, adding that he's most looking forward to the AquaDome, Thrill Island and Surfside neighborhoods. Surfside is Royal Caribbean's first neighborhood made for young families. There are the sprawling Splashaway Bay and Baby Bay aquaparks for little ones to have fun with slides, spray fountains and a massive drench bucket, all while the adults keep an eye on them from the Water's Edge pool. Staying dry is just as exciting with a beach-themed carousel, an arcade with more than 30 new and retro games, and activities like family festivals. And when it's time to recharge between adventures, have your pick of places where every member of the family can grab a bite and a drink, including the new Surfside Eatery buffet, a convenient pick-up window at Surfside Bites and even a bar with menus for adults and kids called The Lemon Post. You could literally spend all day in Surfside, too, because there are new family eateries and suites, like the three-story Ultimate Family Townhouse and the Surfside Family Suites, nestled right in the neighborhood. Do you have what it takes to brave the adrenaline-pumping Crown's Edge 154 feet above the ocean?Credit: Royal Caribbean You'll find the biggest thrills at Thrill Island, a lost island adventure and brand-new neighborhood where Captain Jerry 6—the largest waterpark at sea—awaits with the tallest, fastest and longest slides like the first family raft slides on a cruise ship. For the bravest, there's Crown's Edge, an experience that's part skywalk, part ropes course, part thrill ride 154 feet above the ocean. Thrill Island is also home to returning favorites that have been reimaged, including the Adrenaline Peak rock climbing wall and the Lost Dunes mini-golf course. With so much thrill also comes plenty of ways to chill, like at Chill Island and Henrik's top pick, the AquaDome. Perched at the top of Icon is the new AquaDome, which Henrik describes as "spectacular." By day, the transformational neighborhood is a tranquil oasis with 220-degree ocean views. At night is when it all transforms into a vibrant hot spot that comes alive with restaurants, bars and jaw-dropping entertainment. Here, you'll catch shows at the next-level AquaTheater that combines artistry and cutting-edge technology with aerialists, acrobats, high divers, state-of-the-art projection and more. And did we mention the 55-foot-tall waterfall that towers over it all? The Hideaway—which has beach club vibes—is home to uninterrupted ocean views as well as the first suspended infinity pool at sea.Credit: Royal Caribbean No doubt, the unforgettable experiences you can have while sailing from one destination to the next is a big part of what makes a cruise the vacation of a lifetime. Henrik's tip to make it the best getaway yet? "Do your research, don't pack too much and make the most of every minute." The adventures you can experience on a cruise aboard Icon include the tropical destinations you'll visit, too. While Henrik has been around the world, he says that with Icon he's most looking forward to visiting St. Maarten, a historic hotspot in the Caribbean that's governed by two countries, France and The Netherlands; and Cozumel, a stunning Mexican island off the Yucatan Peninsula. More than 120 acres of thrill and chill is what's in store on Royal Caribbean's private island destination, Perfect Day at CocoCay.Credit: Royal Caribbean Of course, he also can't wait to spend time on Perfect Day at CocoCay, Royal Caribbean's private island destination in The Bahamas. You'll find all kinds of things to do there, like plunging down 13 waterslides—including Daredevil's Peak, the tallest in North America, or kicking back on miles of white sand beaches and at laidback spots like the first overwater cabanas in The Bahamas. Henrik says Perfect Day is "an incredible last day for everyone to enjoy." When Icon debuts in just under a year, Henrik is most excited about getting to deliver thousands of iconic vacations to families, thrill-seekers, chill enthusiasts, couples and groups of friends. "My job is very fulfilling," he said. "I make use of my passion and talent while delivering exceptional cruise vacations to our guests and get to work with incredible crew members from all over the world." Are you ready for the Icon of vacations? Head here to see where Icon is headed and all the experiences you have in store. Royal Caribbean International has been delivering innovation at sea since its launch in 1969. Each successive class of ships is a record-breaking architectural marvel that revolutionizes vacations with the latest technology. Today, the cruise line continues to dial up the guest experience for adventurous travelers, offering bold onboard thrills, spectacular dining options, breath-taking entertainment and world-class accommodations. All while sailing exciting itineraries to 270+ destinations in 60+ countries on six continents. Royal Caribbean has been voted Best Cruise Line Overall for 22 consecutive years by Travel Weekly readers. And Perfect Day at CocoCay, its private island in The Bahamas, has been recognized as the Private Island Destination by Travel Weekly readers for five years running. President and Chief Executive Officer, Royal Caribbean Group, Chief Financial Officer, Royal Caribbean Group, Chief Marketing Officer, Royal Caribbean International, Senior Vice President, Sales, Trade Support & Service, Senior Vice President, Revenue Management, Vice President, Finance and Administration, Senior Vice President, Marine Operations, Chief Product Innovation Officer, Senior Vice President, Hotel Operations, Sign up today to get the latest deals in your inbox. Whether you're looking for a vacation that takes you to sunny Caribbean beaches or cool Arctic waters, tips from people who travel the world for a living—like Royal Caribbean crew members—come in handy. Meet Captain Stig Nilssen, who has spent 40 years at sea. He also happens to be one of the two captains of the world's longest cruise, the Ultimate World Cruise, a 274-night adventure to more than 150 destinations in 65 countries—from Europe to the South Pacific. Captain Stig has been at the helm of Royal Caribbean ships since 1994, including Brilliance, Jewel and Serenade of the Seas. All these years have afforded him experiences in many places like New Zealand, The Bahamas and Scandinavia, and on the Ultimate World Cruise—which begins December 2023—he'll set off on his biggest adventure yet. As you plan your next big adventure, there are plenty of cruises and ships to consider. We asked Captain Stig for his expert tips on everything from the destinations and experiences you can't miss to what there is to look forward to on the world cruise. Get to know Captain Stig and discover what to see and do in destinations you can visit with Royal Caribbean, such as the ABC Islands, Norway and Australia. Captain Stig Nilssen has sailed the oceans for 40 years and traveled all over the world.Credit: Royal Caribbean Q: Why did you become a captain and what are some favorite moments from your career so far? Captain Stig: My family has generations of sailors and deep-sea fishermen. I never considered another career, and by the age of 24, I owned and operated my own fishing boat in the high latitudes of the Arctic Ocean. After a few years, I decided to change course. I attended the Merchant Marine Academy in Norway and have been in the cruise industry ever since. It's been 27 years since I joined Royal Caribbean. Some of my favorite moments will always be the interactions I've had with the thousands of guests and crew members I have encountered over the years. I can truly say I have friends all over the world. Q: What are you most looking forward to as Captain for Royal Caribbean's first Ultimate World Cruise? Captain Stig: I look forward to welcoming the adventurous guests who have chosen this epic cruise. As a longtime student of maritime history, I'm also excited to share my knowledge and point out places that were visited long ago by the likes of famous explorers and adventurers Captain Cook, Francis Drake, Ernest Shackleton and Roald Amundsen. I will do this during daily announcements and formal or informal talks throughout the cruise. Q: You've visited many destinations during your time at sea. Which is one of your favorites? Captain Stig: I am a true son of the Arctic. I was born north of the Arctic Circle in Norway and have lived there my entire life. Scandinavian destinations like Copenhagen, Denmark, and Stockholm, Sweden, which are on the list of places we'll visit on the Ultimate World Cruise, are always close to my heart. Editor's note: During his time off, Captain Stig gets involved in Norwegian coastal heritage and culture by maintaining and restoring historical vessels. Royal Caribbean ships serve up a world of flavors in restaurants that span from Italian trattorias to American steakhouses and teppanyaki.Credit: Royal Caribbean Q: You were the first captain of Serenade of the Seas and are now returning for the Ultimate World Cruise. What are several top amenities and experiences guests can't miss on a ship like this one? Captain Stig: Our incredible chefs on board Serenade are planning delicious culinary specialties in our various restaurants. You also can't miss the famous Chef's Table. Guided by our chef de cuisine on board, it is one of the most exclusive and elevated experiences you can have on the ship. You'll taste several locally inspired courses paired with different wines as we make our way around the world. Q: Do you have any recommendations for what you can see and do in places like Norway? Captain Stig: In the Norwegian fjords, I recommend trying one of our shore excursions. One of my favorite activities is hiking on one of the well-maintained trails in the area. For example, in Geiranger, you can hike to Storsetfossen, a spectacular local waterfall. Be sure to walk behind it to feel the power of the water as it rushes past you. Pro tip: Shore excursions in Norway can include digging into art and history at Oslo's Munch Museum, named after Norwegian artist Edvard Munch. One of the most recognizable landmarks in Australia is the Sydney Opera House, widely regarded as an engineering marvel.Credit: iStock Q: What are some other top destinations you can visit on a Royal Caribbean cruise? Captain Stig: In Sydney, Australia, you can visit the Australian Maritime Museum as well as take a stroll around the Sydney Opera House and across the Sydney Harbour Bridge. And in Morocco, I highly recommend a visit to the local marketplaces. My other favorite spots are the ABC islands in the Caribbean: Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao. The water is crystal clear for snorkeling and scuba diving. An underwater trip on board a submarine is also a must. Pro tip: One of the best places to snorkel in The Bahamas is Perfect Day at CocoCay, Royal Caribbean's private island destination, where you can explore turquoise waters off the shores of white sand beaches or hop on one of 13 waterslides in Thrill Waterpark and much more. Q: What can guests look forward to about the Ultimate World Cruise? Captain Stig: This is a first for Royal Caribbean, which is very exciting, and I am honored to be the captain. Having the opportunity to visit so many destinations, including 11 great wonders of the world, will be a memorable and unique experience. There will be countless highlights—from the thrills of seeing giant blue whales and penguins in the Arctic to serenely cruising between the islands of the South Pacific. Royal Caribbean ships visit more than 240 destinations, sailing around the world from the Caribbean to the South Pacific, Europe and Alaska. Wherever you want to go, there's a ship that will get you there and offer you a wide variety of restaurants, entertainment, activities for the whole family and more. Ready to set sail around the world? Head here to choose your Royal Caribbean cruise. As Royal Caribbean's newest (and largest!) ship, Symphony of the Seas, prepares to set sail from Barcelona, Spain, to idyllic Mediterranean destinations, we'd like you to meet the man at the helm—Captain Rob Hempstead. Captain Hempstead has sailed with Royal Caribbean International since 1999, and has served as Master aboard six ships since 2005 making him well prepared to sail Symphony. "After working at sea for more than 30 years, I've never once wished for another life of less excitement, exploration and adventure," he says. Captain Hempstead was born on the coast of Rhode Island, a famous sailing state. He first went to sea as a young boy with his dad, who carried on the family tradition of setting out to sea. There was never a doubt that Rob would someday set sail too, and in 1986, he graduated from the California Maritime Academy and accepted his U.S. Naval Reserve commission. Though he's now on the largest cruise ship in the world, his career began with the U.S. commercial fishing fleet in the frigid Bering Sea and North Pacific Ocean. After nearly 14 years of fast-paced fishing worldwide, Hempstead changed course and joined Royal Caribbean. "Fishing entailed a lot of rough weather, harsh conditions, stress, no sleep and hard work," he says. "Now, I get to work with the greatest crew on earth!" Here's a look at the newly delivered Symphony of the Seas—and the captain's favorite destinations, tips for making the most of our newest vessel, and what it's like to dock a ship of this proportion. Why are you excited to be the startup captain of Symphony? Symphony is the fleet's newest addition to the family, and it is an honor to be appointed her first captain. She will be our fleet's new flagship, and to have a hand in her success is a great privilege and responsibility. Can you tell us about any of the new navigational technology aboard Symphony? We will have the latest hardware and software produced in the industry. Part of the process of working on "a startup ship" is helping to adjust the bridge layout to ensure it fits our purpose. During sea trials, I had the opportunity to work with the various navigation equipment vendors, who are on board for testing, calibration, and training. What have been some of your favorite destinations while sailing? Any favorite coastlines? There are so many. To name a few: Nawiilwili, Kauai; Champagne Bay, Vanuatu; Sydney, Australia; Hobart, Tasmania; Ville France, France; Labadee, Haiti; and anywhere in the Caribbean! My favorite coastlines are Southeastern Alaska and the whole North American Pacific, New Caledonia, and the Greek Islands. Are there special accommodations needed for sailing and docking the world's largest ship? Because of Symphony's configuration, we have to use cameras during certain evolutions due to our limited visibility. We also post officers at both the bow and stern areas to monitor distances using range finders when maneuvering in close proximity to hard objects like piers or moored ships, to verify our onboard sensors. Generally speaking, due to Symphony's size—1,188 feet long, 215.5 feet wide—we must be very precise in planning and executing any maneuvers. The world's ports are roughly the same size as they've always been, with a few exceptions made just for us, so we have to handle Symphony with the greatest care to get her to fit. Thank you, Captain Hempstead! Click here to learn more about Symphony of the Seas and book your own adventure at sea on board our most exciting ship yet. Captain Sindre Borsheim is charting an exciting course at the helm of Odyssey of the Seas, the latest to join our lineup of game-changing ships. With decades of experience—20-plus years of which have been with Royal Caribbean—he is no stranger to the high seas. But he is among the first to captain the ship as it sets off from South Florida on six- and eight-night Caribbean cruises. When you're on a ship like Odyssey, there's a lot to explore, like the high-tech features, exciting adventures and mouthwatering cuisine. Who better than the captain to give an inside look at what's in store on board? We spoke with Captain Sindre about all things Odyssey, his career and what it's like to "take the wheel" of the latest Royal Caribbean ship: Odyssey of the Seas sails to Aruba, Curacao, Grand Cayman, Perfect Day at CocoCay, Mexico and more.Credit: Royal Caribbean Q: What's the most exciting aspect of being at the helm of a new ship like Odyssey? Captain Sindre: I'm left in awe of this beautiful ship each day, deck by deck. All of us on board are eager and excited to share Odyssey with our guests, and it's been a long time since we've had the opportunity to show what makes Royal Caribbean cruises such memorable vacations. Our crew sets high standards, and we strive to deliver beyond expectations. Captain Sindre Borsheim has been with Royal Caribbean for 22 years and became a captain in 2010.Credit: Captain Sindre Q: Can you give us an idea of your journey to becoming the captain of a cruise ship? Captain Sindre: I started my seafaring career at 16. I felt the need to set a new course, so to speak, and was lucky enough to find what I wanted to do at an early age, which motivated me to go back to school and pass the nautical exams. I first ended up on Royal Norwegian Navy submarines as a navigational assistant. Afterward, I decided I needed space, fresh air and a big team, so I decided to give the cruise industry a go. Royal Caribbean had (and still has) the best reputation for safety and innovation, which was appealing to me. I was fortunate enough to serve as a 2nd Officer on Rhapsody of the Seas in 1999. The brilliant mentors I've met on board since then have meant everything to me. They helped me reach my goal of becoming a captain in 2010. Guests can enjoy the "Sunday supper" experience at Giovanni's Italian Kitchen & Wine Bar, serving classic Italian dishes with a contemporary flair.Credit: Royal Caribbean Q: What are the top things guests can't miss when they sail aboard Odyssey? Captain Sindre: While the curry on board is my favorite dish, the specialty restaurants really are something else. I had the pleasure of trying our new Italian trattoria, Giovanni's Italian Kitchen & Wine Bar. It was spectacular, and I highly recommend it. When it comes to activities, try our sky diving simulator, RipCord by iFly. And families will love SeaFlex; it's the largest indoor and outdoor activity space you'll find at sea. Everyone can have a good time there and then grab a bite at Playmakers Sports Bar & Arcade—new to SeaFlex. The Royal Caribbean app transforms the way travelers cruise.Credit: Royal Caribbean Q: Can you tell us about some of the efficiencies and technology on board? Captain Sindre: There is plenty of tech behind the scenes. For example, Odyssey uses artificial intelligence (AI) to optimize our routes to improve fuel efficiency. There's also Selective Catalytic Reduction (SCR) technology, which reduces the nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions from our diesel engines. Our guests will find the many benefits of technology on this ship in the palm of their hand too. With the Royal Caribbean app, they can open their stateroom using their smartphone, complete the safety drill independently, and use the Daily Planner to browse and schedule activities and entertainment. One of the new, exciting experiences you can't miss is Virtual Adventure Zone, a virtual reality adventure that feels very real. Editor's note: Virtual Adventure Zone is the first fully immersive 4D VR experience at sea. It uses multisensory effects, like water, wind and scent, to enhance the journey from start to finish. Up, Up & Away floats up to 450 feet above Perfect Day at CocoCay, making it the highest vantage point in The Bahamas.Credit: Royal Caribbean Q: Which destinations on Odyssey's Caribbean itineraries are you most excited to visit and why? Captain Sindre: I will finally get to visit Perfect Day at CocoCay! All the reviews of the island are excellent, and I am thrilled to have the opportunity to experience it firsthand. Pro tip: You'll discover endless thrills and ways to chill at Perfect Day at CocoCay—from the tallest waterslide in North America and a helium balloon ride that offers the highest vantage point in the region, to serene, white sand beaches and private floating cabanas. Roller skate in SeaFlex before taking part in one of many experiences, like bumper cars, found in the largest indoor and outdoor activity center at sea.Credit: ROYAL CARIBBEAN Q: What is the best part of your job? Captain Sindre: In addition to watching our guests enjoy their vacations with us, I also love seeing and being a part of fellow crew members succeeding and advancing in their careers. I'm proud to represent a company that offers equal opportunity, regardless of sex, nationality, race, gender or age. The possibilities are enormous. Q: When you're not captaining a ship, what is life like at home? Captain Sindre: In addition to spending quality time with my 8-year-old son, I love fishing, skiing and inviting friends over for a nice meal! When you're ready to set sail with Captain Sindre and his team on board Odyssey of the Seas, head here to choose your Royal Caribbean cruise.