



Escape the ordinary on a specialty cruise

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Do you sometimes feel like vacations are more work than play? Then maybe it's time to try a cruise.

Forget the long drives or rental car and restaurant searches. When you're on a cruise, you can leave those hassles behind. Meals, entertainment, recreation and, in some cases, airfare are all included in an array of packages from a variety of cruise lines.

Lately, cruise lines large and small have been seeing a surge in specialty cruises. "People are no longer content sitting on a lounge chair eating bonbons," said Howard Moses, president of the Cruise Authority, a local cruise operator. "There are all kinds of themed cruises out there, like political, religious, health, finance, poker and even a 'Guitar Players Cruise.'"

Cruise experts such as Moses have years of experience matching customers' interests with just the right trip. It's simple to book a specialty cruise. Howard Moses' company can create a themed cruise package that's just right for you.

Add some spice to your cruise...

On Silversea Cruises, there are 15 culinary sailings offered worldwide. Known as the Relais and Chateaux Culinary Series, this luxury line allows guests to hobnob with accomplished chefs to learn their techniques.

The cruises also feature regional dishes, food and wine pairings and a five-course grand gourmet dinner. Chefs including Joachim Koerper of Spain's legendary Girasol restaurant; Rick Tramonto, partner and executive chef of Oxford, England's Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons; and Katrina Markoff, a chocolatier from Chicago's Vosges Haut-Chocolat are some of the culinary professionals on hand throughout these cruises.

You can catch any culinary cruise from several embarkation points including Buenos Aires, Argentina; Auckland, New Zealand; and the closest point, San Diego, Calif.

Aside from the culinary arts series, Silversea also has other exotic series. The Wine Series includes educational lectures, tastings and guided tours to scores of wineries and cellars.

If golfing is more your speed, then the Silver Links series is for you. Onboard golf professionals are on hand to take you to some of the world's finest and most challenging courses.

Silversea has also created a cruise for the explorer in us. People who have traveled the earth in a hot air balloon and filmed the Titanic are on board to provide lectures on their adventures in the Spirit of Exploration cruises.

Something for everyone...

While there are many excursions available, Moses is most excited about the Guitar Players cruise. This voyage consists of individual classes leading up to performances on the ship. He hopes to expand this idea with the Camp Jam Experience. Camp Jam is a rock 'n' roll fantasy camp operated by former .38 Special guitarist Jeff Carlisi. Participants spend time jamming with Carlisi and members of acts including Billy Joel's band and Lynard Skynard. The program has been a national success, and Moses hopes to team up with Carlisi to take Camp Jam to the high seas.

Now that baby boomers, Generation Xers and even younger travelers are getting on board with cruises, operators are catering to their tastes. Who would have known 30 years ago that a cruise would include a whitewater rafting trip or mountain biking adventure?

"Instead of just getting off at a stop and wandering around the port, we can arrange private tours for people," Moses explained. "For example, you can get off a ship and a car will be waiting for you to take you into parts of the Vatican that most people cannot get into."

Themed cruises have been around for years, Moses said. "This isn't new," he said. "People are just realizing now that it is out there. We tend to be overwhelmed."

Whether it's a cooking cruise, a NASCAR-themed voyage or a musical experience, there's a specialty cruise waiting for you. Go ahead, hop on board.

Silversea Cruises ships hold a maximum of 382 passengers. Because Silversea ships are smaller, they are able to get into more exotic ports than many cruise lines.

Silversea Cruises goes to South America, Asia, Africa, Northern Europe, the Mediterranean, Alaska, the Caribbean and Mexico. Silversea's Culinary Arts Cruises are hosted by award-winning chef-restaurateur Rick Bayless.

Rick Bayless is the fourth generation in an Oklahoma family of restaurateurs and has introduced America to authentic Mexican cuisine.