



Theme Cruises: The Newest Development in Cruising

by: Howard Moses

There is a new type of traveler on the horizon, one who is no longer satisfied simply relaxing on the beach, sightseeing or shopping. These new travelers want to combine their vacation with active participation in their passion or hobby and spend time mixing with experts in the field and those who share their interest.

Do you have an interest in politics? Rock and roll music? Cycling? Photography? Alternative lifestyles? Golf? Religious pursuits? These are just a sampling of themes -- and there is very likely a theme cruise for you.

A new, comprehensive web portal has been developed to allow the traveling public to search by topic for theme cruises of interest. At www.themecruisefinder.com, travelers will find an exhaustive, searchable database of theme cruises sailing throughout 2008-09. With currently over 500 theme cruises listed, there is a cruise from just about anyone.

There are two primary types of theme cruises those put on by private organizations and those put on by the cruise lines themselves. While the differences may seem insignificant, it is important to understand the differences.

Private organizations - The most common theme cruise you'll see are those developed by some type of organization and administered by a travel agency. This means that in order to participate in the described events, guests must book through the participating travel agency and general guests onboard the ship will be prohibited from participating in events.

These cruises might be comprised of as few as 25-30 guests, or as many as 1,000. Interested parties are encouraged to peruse the web site, or call the travel agency or organization and ask questions to determine what should be expected on board in terms of seminars and activities.

It is not unusual for an organization to mark up the cost of their cruise to offset the cost of putting it on, or to generate profits (or fund raising for a non-profit). Some

organizations list this mark-up as a separate participation fee, while others choose to make it part of the overall cruise price.

Keep in mind that many (but certainly not all) private cruises may include additional cruise line fees such as government taxes, port fees, fuel surcharges, gratuities as part of their overall cruise price - which is important to note if you are comparing the cruise price to the retail price out in the marketplace. While you may pay a premium to participate in a private theme cruise, the added value normally far outweighs the additional cost.

Cruise Line - Many cruise lines develop and implement their own theme cruises to attract guests. The advantage of these type of theme cruises is that there is normally no additional cost to participate in the event. Any travel agency can book you on a cruise line oriented theme cruise.

Everyone on board can participate making cruise line developed cruises inherently less intimate, and as such these events tend to be less hands on, and more seminar, speaker or musically oriented. As such, guests usually pay no additional fee to participate.

A side benefit to theme cruises is the reality that not all couples may share similar enthusiasm for a given interest or topic. In this respect cruising really shines, as there are myriad activities for the non-participant to enjoy as part of the normal amenities of a cruise vacation. While the attendee is busy with the subject at hand, the spouse can be taking advantage of shipboard activities or shore excursions which are of interest to them.

Perhaps the most overlooked aspect of theme cruises is traveling and socializing with like-minded people who share a passion for a subject or hobby. Knowing that you'll be sailing with others who share this interest certainly makes for a more interesting and pleasant vacation.

Single travelers tend to make up a larger percentage of theme cruise guests, as they can be certain there will be others on board whom they have at least one significant interest in common. Most private cruises have social events and dinners limited to only those who are attending the event, making the single traveler feel immediately connected.

Regular theme cruise guests report that they are less likely to sail aboard a regular cruise due to the lack of content and connection with their fellow travelers. Theme cruises add a new, vital dimension to vacation travel.