

CRUISING

More to eat, drink, see and learn

Top trends for 2012 show cruisers want more to explore

DIANE TIERNEY
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

The passion for cruising as an exciting way to explore the world continues to grow for 2012. More than five new ships launched last year and six more are coming. Here are the top 10 cruising trends, as predicted by cruise experts.

Emerging destinations

Richard Sasso, president and CEO of MSC Cruises says they're expanding existing markets to create a longer cruise season.

"A prime example is cruising Europe, which has become a year-round destination. All 11 MSC ships will sail Europe in 2012," he said. "We'll also expand emerging markets such as Asia, South America, the Middle East and Australia and we've added Abu Dhabi and the Emirates to our itineraries."

"Adventure and expedition cruising is extremely hot today," said Brad Ball, director of media relations for Silversea. "Our Arctic voyages sold out this summer and the Antarctic voyages will sell out soon. Although the cruise world is getting smaller, seeking out new, undiscovered and uncrowded ports is crucial. Our unique West Africa cruises for 2012 are a reflection of this trend."

Extending port stays

Mark Carlson, director of marketing for Star Clippers, says they are extending their stays in ports.

"Guests want to have more time to enjoy a port, learn the culture and really explore. Some ports require more time than others so we feature later departures. Many guests want to take a shorter tour and also have time to explore on their own. By sailing late in the evening guests can also dine ashore and enjoy the local nightlife."



PHOTO COURTESY OF CARNIVAL

Guests aboard Carnival Magic walk in the WaterWorks aqua park while another shoots through one of two tube slides above them. WaterWorks features a 95-metre long Twister water slide, the longest in Carnival's fleet.

10-day cruises

Seabourn has noticed a new cruise audience emerge for whom seven-day sailings are too short and two-week itineraries too long. So the line is launching a new series of 10-day cruises in the Mediterranean in 2012.

More partnerships with major brands

Look for an increase in "branded partnerships" to provide guests with well-known choices, said Vance Gulliksen, manager of public relations for Carnival. "We've recently partnered with Guy's Burger Joint from the Food Network's Guy Fieri, Punchliner Comedy Clubs, EA Sports Bars and Hasbro."

The Norwegian Epic, considered a floating Las Vegas, continues to secure name brand acts such as Blue

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Man Group, Cirque Dreams and Dinner, Legends in Concert, Howl at the Moon Dueling Pianos show, Slam Allen Band and Nickelodeon.

Unique top-deck offerings

The new Carnival Magic has a 95-metre-long waterslide — the longest in the fleet — as well as a daring tightrope course.

On the new Costa Favolosa, the Formula One simulated race car experience offers thrills of travelling at virtual speeds of 350 km/h.

On Star Clippers you can climb the mast to the crow's nest, help hoist the sails and even steer the ship.

Better all-inclusive value

Saving money and getting more for less is the mantra for today's passengers. "To show the value of cruising, luxury lines have launched aggressive savings to entice first timers and also get mass-market cruisers to upgrade to luxury. This is being done with complimentary airfare, credits and discounts," said Ball.

PG Cruises is offering free airfare from Los Angeles to Papeete for their Tahitian voyages and many

other lines are offering half-price fares and two-for-one deals.

In the ongoing debate of hidden cruise costs, a recent study of a 10-night Regent Seven Seas Mediterranean cruise compared to a non-all-inclusive line showed the luxury line could be less expensive.

Since Regent includes flights, alcohol, shore excursions, transfers and tips, the cost was \$4,524 compared to \$4,915 for a regular cruise.

Customized shoreside experiences

The future will also bring greater customization of shoreside experiences.

"Guests . . . want to have experiences they can't arrange on their own," Ball said. "They are looking for authenticity — genuine, non-manufactured excursions." Silversea is introducing 19 new adventures. Climb the steps of the Potala Palace in Tibet, walk the sand dunes of the Namib Desert and more.

Enrichment programs

Travellers want to be enriched while on vacation. "Hugh Downs and Bill Bryson are two of the guest lecturers for our 2012 World Cruise," Ball said. "We will also offer about 20 voyages featuring Relais & Châteaux L'École des Chefs cooking school."

Extensive renovations to ships

Carnival recently announced Fun Ship 2.0, a \$500 million enhancement program to upgrade their ships. Even smaller lines are renovating. PG Cruises recently spent more than \$6 million renovating their Paul Gauguin ship to make it the most luxurious vessel to sail Tahiti year-round.

More adults-only areas

There will be more adults-only areas for those seeking serenity. Princess ships' Sanctuary areas are private getaways with plush seating and massage cabanas.

Celebrity Silhouette offers their Hideaway area and the Norwegian Epic has their Posh Beach Club for peace and quiet.