



Making Waves

Cruise ships are gaining popularity with planners by offering alluring destinations, extended networking opportunities and favorable economics.

With dozens of beautiful ships mirroring the best hotels in the world, readily accessing bucket list destinations in favorable cost structures and enhancing opportunities for strong relationship-building, more groups are turning to cruises to create memorable events.

ASHIP FOR EVERYBODY

“We’ve come a long way in the cruise industry from small vessels with tiny portholes,” says Joyce Landry, co-founder and CEO of Landry & Kling Inc., a travel company specializing in incentive cruises and corporate events at sea. “Today’s ships are every bit as stunning as some of the best hotels out there and offer tremendous meeting and event options.”

Cruises appeal to affinity groups, alumni organizations, corporate groups and geographically dispersed associations. Whether a 32-room megayacht or a 6,000-passenger luxury liner, there is a ship for everybody.

“Cruising was an ideal choice for our association meeting,” says Chez Chesak, who organized Adventure Travel World Summit while he was vice president of corporate development for the Adventure Travel Trade Association. He now runs his own travel consulting business.

The group hosted 200 attendees with Norwegian expedition line Hurtigruten on a five-day Fjord-filled adventure from Tromsø to Bergen. “It was the best of both worlds,” Chesak says. “Because we had the meeting facilities onboard, we were able to have a conference and a familiarization tour all in one.”

COST AND INCLUSIVENESS

Landry notes one advantage cruising offers planners is cost, particularly with production and food.

“It’s a nice surprise for a meeting planner to have

a coffee break that costs dollars, not tens of dollars,” says Landry. “It’s very inexpensive to have a meeting break on board because the food is already included in the cost. All you’re paying is a setup fee.”

Planners find the ease of meal planning is also a plus. “Imagine having a meeting with 200 to 300 people and having them order off a menu as though they’re in a restaurant? That’s what you can do on a cruise ship,” says Landry, noting the ease in which most lines accommodate special dietary requirements like gluten-free, vegetarian and vegan.

FORGING RELATIONSHIPS

Affinity groups have come to recognize the unique relationship-building aspects cruises offer their members, turning to lines like Lindblad Expeditions to create special programs.

“They’re looking for an experience that’s transformational on a more intimate vessel... to bond, forge deep relationships and get deeply connected with our team onboard, the experience and with the area that they’re visiting,” says Karen Kuttner-Dimitri, vice president of affinity and charter sales for Lindblad Expeditions.

Kuttner-Dimitri says in addition to traditional affinity groups like museums and universities, Lindblad works extensively with nontraditional groups such as LGBTQ, kosher, and different cultural and religious groups—serving more than 60 groups annually.

“An example is a group of climate change leaders who want to have a forum and a location to gather together among equally influential people representing different organizations,” says Kuttner-Dimitri. “It runs the gamut of the types and numbers of organizations that we have, both on a group and charter basis where they take the full ship.” —MJS

All Aboard

“Consider having a spouse program,” Landry suggests. “Cruise lines derive their revenue based upon double occupancy that’s built into their pricing so there is value in having two people per room. When participants bring a guest, their experience is enhanced by sharing it with someone they care about and that carries over to the success of the event.”