

Vacations Of A Lifetime

Choosing Cruising: Tips For The New Cruiser

(NAPSA)—The ocean cruise vacation is in the midst of a full-blown renaissance. Gone, however, are the days when the cruise experience centered on buffet and conga lines. Today's modern ships boast sprawling, state-of-the-art spas, extensive menus crafted by world-renowned chefs, and activities and programs to cater to just about every interest under the sun.

A record 10 million people will set sail in 2004, and the industry's popularity is only gaining momentum, according to the Cruise Lines Association International. Still, only about 15 percent of the U.S. population has ever taken a cruise.

For those who are thinking about getting on board, Travelers Advantage offers these considerations for your first cruise:

- Cruise lines have distinct personalities. Discriminating travelers pay a premium to be indulged aboard such luxury lines as Radisson Seven Seas Cruises and Silversea, Holland America ships are refined and exude class and Princess is both posh and pioneering. If you're taking the kids along, Disney beckons the whole family and Carnival boasts a fleet of "fun ships."

- Timing is everything. Cruises during summer and holiday school breaks will always have more children and families. Booking cruises well in advance of their sailing date can often translate into significant savings, and sailing during the slow season is usually less expensive as well.

- Ship size matters. Smaller ships (500 passengers or less) provide an intimate environment that often features highly personalized service and unique itineraries. Medium-size ships (between 500 and 1,000 passengers) have a



With hundreds of cruises all over the world, you're bound to find one that's good for you.

fair amount of onboard activity and entertainment without the volume of people found aboard a mega ship. Large ships (1,000 passengers or more) cater to travelers who crave great, diverse amounts of organized entertainment, high-tech facilities and plenty of new friends.

- Different regions have a different focus. Canada/New England cruises are perfect for exploring the historic towns along the East Coast. Nature lovers fall in love the first time they cruise Alaska. The Mediterranean is perfect for diving into other cultures. Adventure abounds along the Panama Canal. Fun and sun can always be found in Hawaii and the Caribbean.

- Voyages come in all lengths. According to the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), nearly one-third of all cruises in 2004 were out to sea for five days or less. Short trips are economical, which is great for first-time cruisers who want to test the waters. More often than not, the shorter the cruise is, the younger the crowd will be.

Learn more at www.travelersadvantage.com.