

# Cruise News

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## Leading a Group Cruise

Many individuals who love to cruise know friends they would like to have them join them on the cruise. These very same travelers can invite friends to join them to cruise. Being a group leader can be rewarding both thru having lots of friends aboard with them and thru extra perks they may secure leading a group. So how does one become a group leader? First contact us to discuss the group they want to cruise. Most groups are acceptable, however the cruise lines do have some guidelines we must follow. Once we collectively determine the group is a good fit, we help pick the most appropriate

cruise departure and ship. Knowing demographics and interests of the group will go a long way towards finding the right ship and sailing. These two items can easily make or break a trip. Once a ship and a few sailing dates are established we work with the cruise line for better pricing and amenities for the group. The group leader will help pick the actual sail date the group will use. Next the group leader will help promote the group to the people they intended to have on the sailing with them. We will also promote the group to those same people and even to others we believe would benefit from the special rates and amenities

we secured for the sailing. Promotion is as simple as sharing the news of the special sailing and inviting those interested to go on the cruise. We handle all of the bookings as well as going thru the particulars with each passenger booked. The group leader and we can jointly create marketing flyers about the cruise to help promote it. One reason we want to promote as much as possible the group is that as more cabins sell we are able to secure more amenities, for the group, or for the group leader as agreed upon before the booking process begins. If you have a group you think would be good on a cruise together contact us.

## Culinary Cruises

Many people work hard planning their cruise vacation. One of the things many look especially forward to enjoying is great food and drink while cruising. For these travelers a culinary cruise is a great option. Culinary cruises are special cruises where a major focus of on-board activities is culinary arts. Usually this includes special foods, wine pairings,

and even cooking classes. Often celebrity chefs are part of the group that helps put on the culinary events. On occasion there are highly visible celebrity chefs who are the focus of the cruise, such as when Paula Deen cruises. In these cases not only is the culinary aspect of the cruise highlighted, so is the interaction with the celebrity. When classes are offered usual-

ly they are demonstration style. Some are offered in a hands-on setting which is a real treat because typically guests are not allowed to handle knives while on a ship. Cruise lines know how seriously some take their food, so work hard to make culinary experience cruises very exciting. Expect to pay a premium for these cruises, depending in part on what is included.

### Is travel to Egypt safe?

Not too long ago we saw many specials for travel to Egypt. Soon thereafter an uprising took the former government officials out of office and left the country in disarray. Since then more elections have occurred leaving the country a bit more organized. Travel there though remains a bit risky.

The US State Department has Egypt warnings posted for travelers. Although they don't restrict US citizen travel to Egypt a very bleak picture of what dangers await is painted by the warnings. This includes brief state-

ments about US citizens being kidnapped and killed while traveling to Egypt.

Border crossing between Israel and Egypt requires advance permission from Egypt and due to the tense nature of that border. Further because the Sinai is considered a very dangerous area for any traveler, especially US citizens, border crossings are not recommended. One danger is the area is full of land mines which must be avoided.

Many travel companies are not yet taking US or for that matter other tourists back into Egypt until the

terrorist attack decline. Most cruises are not presently making port calls in Egypt, something which may change in the future, but likely not until the new government gains good control of the country.

For those looking for a North African vacation, Morocco provides an alternative, although without the pyramids. For now most recommend deferring visits to Egypt until things settle and travel there is once again safe for tourists.



Find neat doorways while walking thru Old San Juan.

### Amusement Parks in LA area?

Many who love amusement parks get excited about the Los Angeles area because of the multiple parks which can easily be visited in a single vacation trip. The amusement parks range from more traditional to ultra modern parks featuring back stage experiences and all the other perks of Hollywood. Many will take all of SW California in during one trip giving an even bigger option of places to visit.

Lego Land, Disney Land, Universal Studios, Knott'sberry Farms, and Sea World (San Diego) all offer fun for family members of all ages. Among these parks visitors find rides, shows, and various interactive activities. Many are good one day parks allowing someone to see several different parks in a single week visit to Southern California.

For the parents head east over the mountains to plan golf and

enjoy some Southern California vineyards and wineries. Of course the beaches are right to the West of cities housing the amusement parks offering plenty of water based activities for the family. Some cruise ships even dock at these cities offering longer at sea experiences. Ultimately, Southern California offers several opportunities for those wanting to visit amusement parks on the West Coast in a relatively nice climate.

**See the Atlantis Island Resort while visiting the Nassau area of the Bahamas.**

**There is plenty for all family members there.**

### Difference between Walt Disney World and Universal Studios Florida

Walt Disney World and Universal Studios Florida are both in the Orlando area and are amusement park complexes. The similarities tend to stop there.

Walt Disney World was a master planned complex, one of such a grand scale it had to be put together initially in secret. It was planned out of the gate as a multi park complex with on property hotels and many other amenities. It has grown from one man's dream into a reality that takes

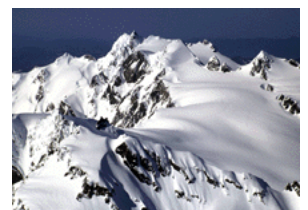
people away from their every day world filled of stress into a magical setting for relaxing and having fun. Disney was the first of the amusement parks to help make Orlando a major international tourist destination.

Universal Studios Florida was built to compete with Disney and give an East Coast option for those who wanted to see what Universal had to offer. They did recreate the best rides from the West Coast and added many more. It is more of a

roller coaster park than is Disney though.

Since inception both have grown to offer more on site hotels and more guest amenities. Both constantly offer new items to draw in and keep bigger crowds. They do tend to compliment each other more than just directly compete head to head. Universal is more amusement park oriented and Disney is more of an overall immersion experience not to be missed.

See the beautiful mountains in Alaska.



## Best Cruise Line for Families

There are several cruise lines who offer great family activities. What sets one apart from the other is how well that one line is able to offer something for everyone on the ship giving everyone a fantastic cruise. Some lines are better than others at entertaining kids while other are adults oriented.

Disney is the constant entertainment company offering entertainment for all ages. Disney owner of ABC and ESPN have resources to call upon to deliver a full entertainment package that appeals to all ages. Disney as a company also has a masterful group of Imagineers who come up with many creative solutions to

enhance the travel and entertainment experience.

Disney is a small cruise line historically operating two ships and more recently expanding to four ships. The newest ships have included many special features that take inside cabins in particular to a whole new level. The inside cabins have electronic portholes that allow viewing of the outdoors and even the occasional Disney character.

Disney creates venues that separate adults from children to keep each entertained and out of the others way. At the same time venues and activities for the entire family abound so when everyone

wants to be away from family they can do that or the family can enjoy entertainment together.

Disney's sail away party is considered by many experienced cruisers to be the most fun of all sail away parties at sea. Disney goes all out with Pirate's night as well with many guests showing up in pirate costume. If weather permits the night ends with a fireworks show, the only one at sea.

Although Disney is the best family cruise line at sea, it does not mean there are not many other great cruise lines for families, several do a great job with families traveling together.

## Cruise Safety Enhancements during 2012

Early this year we all awoke to hear about a tragic cruise ship accident overnight in Europe. After the accident much was made about lax safety procedures with the cruise lines. Personally I had seen different attitudes within companies and definitely between different cruise lines.

After the accident Cruise Line International Associations (CLIA) created a task force to look at needed additional safety changes. Several different procedural changes were made for all CLIA

member lines. Other cruise lines have also in many cases adopted at least some of the changes.

Chief change that many will see is the muster drill will now always occur before departure from the boarding port. This ensures everyone knows what to do in the event of an emergency aboard the ship. When there are multiple boarding ports all new passengers will go thru the drill at the port where they board the ship.

Crew training related to lifeboat

operations will be more in depth and occur more frequently than before. Completely loaded (with crew) life boats will be used frequently in these exercises.

This ensures all crew can help get boats loaded and launched when a crisis hits.

New rules also dictate who may be on the bridge when operating in certain conditions including departing from and arriving to ports of call.

Most lines will now disembark any passenger who refuses to participate in the muster drill.

**Combine an African Safari while visiting and helping Orphans in Africa or helping to expand the reach of faith based hospitals in Africa.**

## Best family cruise ship

Disney has the best family cruise line, but the best family ship actually goes to a different cruise line. Royal Caribbean's Oasis (or Allure) were designed to offer tons of entertainment for everyone on the ship.

As two of the newest ships on the high seas and the only ones with many of the venues found aboard, no other ships come close to offering such a wide variety of entertainment offerings for all ages.

The Oasis and Allure have pro-

grams for the youngest cruisers where non-potty trained children can be cared for by the line. The kids program hosts kids of all ages in tons of space aboard the ship with loads of youth staff to ensure the kids are always entertained. All family members have available rock walls, surfing simulators, ice skating, along with numerous entertainment venues. So many are very popular leading to an advanced ticketing process.

The shows run the range from family oriented to late night adult hu-

mor. There are even weekly kids and sometimes family talent shows. Of course these ships have the only aqua shows. Dining also runs the range from simple fast food type items to the chef's table and of course a cruise staple room service. Because of the ship's size there are many options for sleeping accommodations. Inside to suites that overlook the aqua theater and even huge suites great for family reunions. Lots to offer for everyone.

More Old World Sights when cruising Europe.



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Brooks Cruise Services provides expert guidance in planning your vacation experience to include pre and post cruise planning as well as shipboard and port excursions.

With many cruises sailed personally to various parts of the world we have actual knowledge of these products.

We strive to provide a vacation experience that is beyond your expectations.

### Alaska in the off season

Most travelers think about Alaska as primarily a Summer destination. Those with a sense of adventure or who like Winter sports activities may find many options to enjoy and play in Alaska over the "off-season."

Dog sledding is one of the activities many try to experience in the various port excursions during Summer. Personal experience shows it's a much more exciting activity when in a real sled on real snow on a real dog sled course. Of course those who want to see a sled race need only look for the Iditarod to find an awesome race for viewers.

In my personal experience Alaska has much to offer all thru the year. It is a matter of willingness to seek new adventures. Costs are higher in Alaska than the lower 48 regardless of time of year. That said, there are some great bargains in Alaska during the off season. Many hotels and fishing charters operate with discounted prices. There are also various tours available at discounts and even some which

aren't available at other times of the year.

One of the best parts of visiting Alaska during off peak times is the lower visitor count allowing those there to enjoy undisturbed beauty without as many fellow travelers there to rattle the wildlife or disturb the peace. For some of the best nature viewing in more remote areas the lack of travelers helps. Although in the real off season fewer animals will be about as bears in particular sleep away Winter months.

When planning to travel during the off season one must be prepared in advance for where to stay. Fewer rental cars are available and many hotels are seasonal so depending on the actual travel dates may not be open. The hotel situation is especially critical when venturing out to more remote areas. Also, some remote area don't have regular air service year round and don't have lodging available during off season.

If visiting remote areas is part of the travels, keep in mind travel delays due to

weather are common among the charter flight operations. It does not mean the flight will not get there, but they can easily run late, so plan accordingly on return flights.

Fishing during the off season, depending on the species can still be quite rewarding. Fewer fishermen on the boat can lead to a more personalized experience on the larger boats. This may lead to an opportunity to toss back smaller and try catching bigger fish instead. Ultimately though it is the angler's choice. On six-pack boats with only 4 fisherpersons, it can lead to everyone having their own rod instead of next-up scenario.

Alaska is beautiful year round. I enjoy different activities any time I go up there and always look forward to the next visit. Others who have been before report enjoying going any time of year as well. First time visitors though may prefer wait for the peak season when all tourist activities are in full swing, unless they are into adventure travel. Either way Alaska is a place to visit.