



Cruise Market Update: What's Ahead for 2018?

The surge in new and more diversified ships and itineraries means more options for meetings, incentives and corporate events. By Regina Baraban

The cruise industry is booming. Twenty-six new ocean, river and specialty ships were scheduled to set sail in 2017, representing an investment of \$6.8 billion in new vessels.

From 2017 to 2026, 97 new ships are expected to debut — an estimated investment of \$53 billion, according to Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA). Meetings and incentive programs at sea with international ports of call are also on the rise.

“We definitely see growth in our corporate MICE and charter business,” said Alexis Puma, manager, international charter sales, Celebrity Cruises. “As specific international markets recover economically, the need to reward and retain top talent is on the rise. Meeting planners and companies are wanting to explore new and different ways to keep qualifiers motivated and engaged.”

Meeting planners looking to motivate younger generations take note: Among the top cruise travel trends forecasted by CLIA’s State of the Cruise Industry Outlook 2017 is an uptick in millennials and Generation Xers embracing cruise travel more than ever before. Part of what appeals to the millennial mindset is the wide variety of activities and venues onboard, plus active and authentic destination

adventures. “We can create incredible variety,” Puma said, “ranging from an amazing salmon bake in Juneau for 1,000 guests to an intimate wine tasting with a winemaker in Tuscany for 12 top performers.”

If you haven’t recently checked out the innovative new cruise ships and what they offer corporate meeting groups, “you’re missing the boat,” quipped Lori Cassidy, Royal Caribbean’s associate vice president, global corporate, incentive and charter sales. Royal Caribbean has 25 ships with ports around the world and itineraries of three to seven nights. All have dedicated conference centers and Voom satellite technology, which allows the fastest 4G internet service — critical in today’s business meetings, Cassidy noted.

As for entertainment onboard, ships offer “water, sky, fire and ice shows on par with London and New York,” she said. “Our ships are also known for the most unique event spaces, such as Studio B, a high-tech, multimillion-dollar ice skating venue that can be transformed for meetings and special events.”

With built-in entertainment, no food-and-beverage minimums, lenient attrition schedules and customizable options onboard and ashore, “the value proposition of our ships for the MICE market gets stronger every year,” Cassidy said.



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*Joyce Landry,
Landry & Kling Global
Cruise Events*

Choosing the Right Ship

With growing numbers of ships to choose from, how do you identify the right one for your group? Joyce Landry, CEO of Landry & Kling, shared some tips:

- If you charter a ship, study the destination and ports of call so you can craft an itinerary that meets your program objectives. With your own ship, you can stay in ports later — overnight even — and experience the local culture at night.
- For an active group, make sure the ship offers experiences like cycling, hiking and water sports. For a culinary-oriented group, check out ships that employ specialty chefs, have extensive wine lists or are known for food presentation.
- Don't skimp on accommodations. If your budget allows, go for balcony rooms; spa suites; and/or key card access, top-level accommodations on larger ships. The ship is as much a destination as the ports of call.
- You can expand your budget by finding out what the ship does best (menus, parties, décor, specialty restaurants, etc.) and fitting these into your program. Most cruise lines offer wines and foods from their destinations, so creating a themed event onboard can be done easily. A balance of in-port activities and onboard activities makes the best programming.

Why Choose a Cruise for International Programs?

- Pay for the cruise or ship charter in U.S. dollars, generally, which means no need to worry about exchange rates, currency fluctuations or value-added taxes.
- High level of security — only vetted passengers can come aboard the ship. And if you have a private charter, only your attendees.
- Five- to seven-night itineraries could feature up to seven ports of call in up to five different countries.
- No planes, trains, automobiles, or unpacking and repacking between ports/countries.
- A "floating hotel" is more inclusive than most international land destinations — including meals, entertainment, transportation between ports, meeting space and use of audiovisual. ■

Q&A: On the Horizon with Joyce Landry

Joyce Landry, CEO of Landry & Kling Global Cruise Events, formed her company with business partner Jo Kling in 1982 to pioneer a bold new concept: an exclusive focus on meetings at sea. Since then, the cruise industry has grown exponentially. Cruise ships as meeting venues became commonplace, and Landry & Kling have become a highly awarded meetings industry partner, providing cruise ship solutions and custom cruise planning for ship buyouts, incentive cruises, cruise meetings, music festivals, theme cruises and dockside ship charters for global events. Recently, Landry & Kling launched a new partnership with ConferenceDirect and 3D Cruise Partners. *ConferenceDirect MeetingMentor* caught up with Landry to talk about what this partnership will mean to meeting planners and about current trends in the international cruise market.

What does the new partnership between ConferenceDirect, Landry & Kling Global Cruise Events and 3D Cruise Partners mean for meeting planners?

We're excited to have launched CD@Sea this year, in collaboration with 3D Cruise Partners. Over the years, our two companies have been preferred partners with ConferenceDirect, so it made sense to team up to be the official partner for cruise sourcing and events. Among our missions are to introduce more CD associates to cruising through webinars, lunch-and-learn programs in ports of call and seminars at sea and to expand the cruise segment in the company. Together, we bring global cruise expertise, program experience and negotiating skills that benefit all CD associates and their clients.

Studies indicate that the cruise industry is booming. Can you comment on this as it relates to international programs at sea?

Our international cruise business has increased substantially in the last several years. We see it as confidence in the economy, corporate profits on the rise and the globalization of business. It's not uncommon for companies to have multiple offices around the world, and they need to incentivize a broader audience and host meetings that attract an international audience. It's not only the destinations that are international, it's the attendees as well. As the cruise industry grows, cruise ship operators are branching out — with new and varied ships — to a global audience. This trend to travel internationally by ship is also happening because it's the way people can experience much of the world with safety and comfort.

What are the most popular international routes and ports of call for cruise incentive programs?

Europe, the Mediterranean and the Baltic. The Aegean was off for a few years but is coming back strongly — especially the Greek Islands. Asia/Pacific is experiencing strong growth, especially cruises from China, Japan and Southeast Asia. There are some great short itineraries in all of these locations, which are appealing to corporate groups. We see attractive short cruises in a variety of destinations now — not just the Caribbean, which was the staple for years. Exotic adventure travel is also on the rise, including Antarctica, the Galapagos and even Iceland. And river cruising has grown by leaps and bounds, with dozens of new, elegant riverboats introduced each season on the Danube, the Rhine, and in farther flung areas like the Mekong River in Cambodia and Irrawaddy River in Myanmar.