

## Cruise Control

### *Six Reasons a Cruise Can Keep Costs Under Control*

By Richelle Taylor

Today's meeting planners are as money-minded as they are inventive. One minute, they are reviewing color swatches for décor; the next, they are converting transportation costs from euro to dollar and purchasing rooms in Czech koruna. Budget management is one of a meeting professional's main responsibilities right along with selecting the site, arranging for speakers or negotiating contracts with suppliers. It's a meeting professional's job to get the most value out of the program while still topping last year's program.

What a planner may not realize is that a cruise meeting or incentive allows them to do all that and more.

Here are six reasons to put your next program on "cruise control" and let the ship chart your course to smooth budgeting.

#### **Reason #1 – Multiple Destinations, One Price**

One of the most motivating benefits of a cruise program is the allure of traveling to several destinations all in one trip with the added convenience of only having to pack and unpack your bags once! This unique venue enables planners and attendees a hassle-free experience. "With a cruise program, planners can rest a little easier knowing that their floating hotel simply docks and they walk right off the ship into port," said April Mescher, Executive Director of Travel for Excellence In Motivation, a company which specializes in corporate meetings and incentives. "Plus, ships can often call on smaller, more remote locales that wouldn't have the infrastructure to support a land-based program due to hotel space limitations."

Moreover, a cruise program can provide planners the ability to buy an international trip guaranteed in U.S. dollars – so there is no surprise with currency fluctuation.

"Now, more than ever before, cruising provides the ultimate value along with choice of product in a myriad of worldwide destinations," said Karen Devine, president of 3D Destinations, a worldwide cruise, global hotel sales and DMC sourcing company. "The all-inclusive nature of cruises provides planners with complete cost control and the choice to provide additional a la carte elements as they wish to ensure budgets are maintained."

#### **Reason #2 – Food and Beverage Included**

Unlike a hotel, where hefty food and beverage minimums may be imposed, planners can rest easy without worrying about guaranteeing BEOs, having food to go to waste or exceeding the bar bill at the end of the day. "Ultra-luxury lines like Seabourn Cruise Line provide all guests unlimited complimentary wine, spirits, champagne, soft drinks and bottled waters," said Tanya Barnette, Director of Business Development for Seabourn Cruise Line. Even meeting breaks are included on cruise ships. Meetings breaks typically include coffee, juice, water and snacks thereby eliminating the need to pre-order specific items or quantities. In addition, many cruise lines today are very open to negotiating complimentary receptions or bar enhancements at no additional cost.

For attendees, cruise ships offer multiple restaurants with a variety of world-class menu options for daily meals. Cruise lines provide menus with several selections for each course and are already prepared to handle special dietary needs for any guest. Guests enjoy this type of customer service a ship-venue provides and the freedom to dine how and when they like.

### **Reason #3 – Activities and Entertainment Included**

Most cruise lines offer an array of onboard activities for attendees to enjoy during the course of the program that are at no additional cost. Onboard events such as art auctions, cooking demonstrations, Pilates and yoga classes mean that attendees can spend their free time as they choose with no extra cost to the company sponsoring the trip. “In some cases, ships are even including shore excursions and water sports in the cost of the rate which can amount to significant savings, said Mescher.”

In the evenings, Broadway-style entertainment is offered on almost every ship. Cruise ships employ professional comedians, singers, dancers and actors that perform nightly. In addition, live musicians such as pianists or jazz trios play in lounges and piped music is always available for private functions. A planner doesn’t have to be concerned about the band not showing up because they live and work on the ship!

### **Reason #4 – Production and Audio Visual Included**

Because cruise lines put on such elaborate, high-quality shows, most have full-scale production teams onboard ready to handle a large awards ceremony, general session or presentation. Larger ships can even accommodate a table-top trade show onboard. Whether it is simply having wireless Internet access available or putting on a final night farewell with lighting and staging, planners can rest assured that cruise ships already come equipped with state-of-the-art capabilities. Multi-screen projection, pyrotechnics and even rotating stages can enhance the event. Best of all, the group never has to leave the ship! The savings in rental fees and technical staff can be tremendous.

### **Reason #5 – Spouse and Family Program Friendly**

Overwhelmed because your incentive includes a spouse or children’s program within the winners’ program? A cruise program saves planners considerable time and effort in organizing guest events because they are already included. Today’s ships include built-in movie theaters, basketball courts, putt-putt golf, rock climbing walls, inline / ice skating rinks, water slides and the like to engage spouses and children while the participant is in a general session or board meeting. In addition, ships have dedicated staff trained in working with youth, providing peace of mind to parents and cost savings to a company which doesn’t need to hire room and pay for children’s counselors to sail.

If providing a one-of-a-kind experience for your group is as important as cost, cruises can be customized in a way a hotel cannot match. Buy it out. “Cruise programs not only provide complete cost control for a planner’s budget, but also a wide array of cruise products and destinations from which to choose,” adds Devine. “Charters – when your group buys out the entire ship – are also a fantastic option for the ultimate program experience, and can be purchased for the number of nights the company wishes to sail, and planned ‘out of the box’ in many cases relative to on-board programming, itinerary and inclusions.”

### **Reason #6 – Controlled, Secure Environment**

“Anyone can walk into any hotel in the world at any time, but no one boards a ship that is not a guest or authorized person,” said Barnette. Cruise ships have been utilized by companies seeking the utmost privacy for a product launch. They have also been used by global leaders, like Russian President Vladimir Putin, who chose Silversea Cruise’s *Silver Whisper* as the venue for hosting 46 presidents and prime ministers, plus another 46 ambassadors and ministers for a tri-centennial gathering – all because of the quality, safety and security a ship environment provides.

In addition, a cruise venue offers corporations a “captive audience” for dispersing business messages in contrast to a hotel where attendees may have the opportunity to skip the business session. Planners can easily organize their business meetings when the ship is at sea so that attendees won’t be tempted to slip off on an activity.

Managing a successful program includes wisely managing the budget but the two are not mutually exclusive. A cruise program can provide the quality and motivational appeal attendees expect while at the same time offering the control, affordability and value companies’ desire in today’s economic environment.

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