

Cruise News

Special points of interest:

- > Different Cruise Lines for different folks
- > Burial at sea is possible
- > Alaska is full of great spots to visit
- > Travel insurance and its value



Inside this issue:

Driving an RV to Florida	2
What makes a River Cruise different?	2
Funerals at Sea	2
Hidden Gems of Alaska	3
Hawaii Cruises	3
Will prepaying my hotel save money?	3
Travel Insurance is it worth the cost?	4

How do the cruise lines differ from one another?

Not all cruise lines are the same. This is by design and ultimately benefits cruisers. Even the cruise line executives share that they want their lines different from other lines. This is what pulls in different segments of the cruising population. By focusing on different groups of cruisers ultimately all cruise lines do benefit from a larger cruising audience.

Some lines focus on different segments by delivering a different product and service level. Luxury lines tend to offer few kids programs yielding a mostly adult oriented luxury cruise experience.

Other cruise lines focus on a good level of service and a family friendly experience. Both kinds of lines deliver

great service for the audience they attract.

Some specialty cruise lines provide an experience which attracts very active cruisers with many active shore excursions and shipboard activities. Other lines focus on culinary experiences where the focus is primarily fine dining where shore excursions and other on board activities are secondary.

Some cruise lines are focused on only select destinations and are truly the expert of that destination. When a destination is key to the cruise experience these lines should be considered for that destination.

Disney, Royal Caribbean, NCL and Carnival are all very family oriented cruise lines with things for family members of all ages. They offer a variety of dining

venues and experiences that take range very casual to formal luxury type experiences.

Other cruise lines focus primarily on ports everyone knows with others focused on exploring the worlds exotic ports.

Some lines like huge ships with tons of passengers while others are small intimate yacht like ships. There is something for virtually every kind of cruiser.

When deciding on a cruise it is important that you use an agent who understands the differences between lines to help you pick a cruise which best meets these needs. Be sure to share your expectations for the cruise experience when discussing what cruise to book. This allows for the best matching of your needs to available cruises.

Caring for your Pets, House, Mail, etc while on vacation

Many people work hard planning their vacation to ensure the family has a good time. However, only as an after-thought does caring for the house, pets, and mail get attention. This is something most people need to consider as they are planning vacations to ensure the home does not appear to be unattended making

it a more likely burglary target.

Typically it's a good idea for at least one neighbor to keep a close eye on the house and pick up the mail each day. This is one thing many criminals will check to find a house that may be unattended. The postal service also can hold mail, but that is not necessarily the most reliable

method.

Pets are important family members and their care is important as well. Most resorts and ships do not allow pets. Thus a neighbor, professional pet sitter, family member, or kennel is needed. Most pets do best where they are comfortable so friends or family may be the best bet.

What makes a River Cruise Different?

River Cruises are different from traditional ocean cruises. River cruises use long narrow boats low to the water to allow navigation under bridges. This is different than the supersized ships plying the seven seas. Itineraries are also different. River cruises get right into the heart of cities instead of where the ports are located. Many places visited by river cruise can't even be visited by cruise ship in a day due to distance from sea ports. This allows those who like cruises to go sail the rivers and see different des-

tinations and enjoy a different experience that comes with a river boat.

On river cruises often shore excursions are conducted by crew offering a much more personalized experience. In some cases the chef will lead a tour to the farmers market where the fresh produce for the upcoming few days is purchased to take back aboard the boat.

River boats have fewer passengers thus interaction among guests quickly becomes a strong part of what makes the cruise unique. Often these are experi-

enced cruisers who have traveled around the world so good conversation on travel can be easily found.

Several cruise lines focus on river cruises each owning several boats and often specific rivers of focus. They may also access boats in other regions where they sell cruises aboard boats they don't own. These differences may factor into the decision on who to sail in any specific region of the world.

River cruising is a unique and fun way to see cities up close.



Find neat doorways while walking thru Old San Juan.

**See the Atlantis
Island Resort
while visiting
the Nassau area
of the Bahamas.
There is plenty
for all family
members there.**

Driving an RV to Florida, is it more cost effective?

If you already own an RV you have probably done some cost analysis related to traveling in the RV. For those looking at buying or renting an RV, you will want to consider how you plan to travel and if the costs make sense for your family.

Many with RVs are into camping only, so if this is the case your priority is not necessarily costs. However if you are focused on keeping travel costs down, and enjoy camping, cost

analysis is key to your decision. For these persons, you need to consider the fuel costs which will be more than for a car. Also, consider camping site fees and possibly additional costs for extra persons and electric use. If you drive a large RV you may also need to tow or rent a car at the destination. So if you are looking to visit only one destination in Florida where there is easy flight access from home and inexpen-

sive hotels, you may find going by RV costs quite a bit more. But, if you are looking to see several areas in Florida then your cost advantage begins to kick in.

The cost of going via RV is definitely more than by car, but when you factor in how many stops you want to make and where they are, it is possible that overall the cost of the trip is better in an RV not to mention it may be an easier trip.

Funerals at Sea

For some the love of sea is great. Maybe they served in the Navy or Coast Guard or cruised a lot or had other reasons to love the sea. Regardless of why someone loves the sea it's possible they may want to be buried at sea and we can help.

Burial at sea is possible and achieved fairly easily thru special arrangements with cruise lines. What must happen first is that the deceased be cremated and the ashes placed in special biode-

gradable urns specifically designed for burial at sea. This must all take place sufficiently in advance of the cruise departure and appropriate documents prepared. We coordinate document needs with the cruise line.

We can assist you with cruises to many different areas of the world depending on the deceased's specific choice of where to be released to the sea. Keep in mind though there are some environmentally sensitive destinations where this

may not be feasible regardless of the preparation of the ashes and urn. Thus, discussions about burial at sea should be a key component to the cruise planning process with us.

We will assist with the cruise, as well as funeral at sea arrangements. We are happy to arrange clergy to accompany the trip and full group arrangements if multiple cabins are needed for family to attend the funeral at sea.

See the beautiful mountains in Alaska.



Hidden Gems of Alaska

There are many small towns around Alaska that offer great experiences to travelers who seek them out. Many have long histories tied to native Alaskans who have lived here long before the USA became involved in the state. Many of these villages are fairly well known to those who visit Alaska frequently, but many remain hidden from most traveling to Alaska. This is just because they are not on the main travel routes.

Skagway is one such small town and is fairly well known because it is on cruise port of call list. Other of the best known are Barrow, Dead horse, Nome, and Ketchikan. All offer a unique history and

great ties to the native Alaskans. These towns are all worth a visit for those who want to get to know Alaska better. Also, visiting these towns will give a wide variety of Alaskan destinations to visit North to South, East to West.

Barrow has the added feature of being the northern most city in North America's mainland as well as one of the farthest North towns in the entire world. Access is via air and during the Summer group tours are available. Winter time is unique and you can get private tours while there (I did that right before the New Year).

Two favorite spots are Homer, the Halibut fishing capital and Ketchikan, the Salmon

fishing capital. Not only does each of the towns have facilities for fishing and fish processing, they have their unique history and local flavor.

Sitka is another unique town that is off the beaten path visited only by the infrequent cruise ship. It has again its own unique charm. Like the other towns it is not large so a day or two will get you thru the area seeing at least the highlights. For those who like watching some of the reality shows, you can fly into some of the small towns featured in the Flying Wild Alaska or drive the haul road to see the spots mentioned in Ice Road Truckers. These are all great spots to visit.

Hawaii Cruises

There are three ways to cruise to Hawaii. They are all very different and depending on which you take your experience will be very different.

The first way is to fly to Hawaii and board one of a couple ships operating in Hawaii waters typically on weeklong cruises. These cruises by law must be operated by US flagged ships which means US crew. This causes the cost of the cruises to increase in part due to the increased cost of operating the cruise since the crew must be US crew with US

prevailing wage laws.

Another way to see Hawaii is to sail to Hawaii from the US Mainland. These cruises occur a few times per year on major cruise lines. These cruises typically sail from California and are two or more weeks in length largely due to the time it takes to cross from California to Hawaii and back. The cruises typically stop for part of a day in Mexico to visit a foreign port as required. Some of these cruises can be a lot of fun if you like sea days.

The last way to see Hawaii by cruise ship is to stop on a trans-Pacific cruise. Repositioning cruises from the South Pacific often stop in Hawaii for a day or more to allow them to enjoy the highlights of Hawaii while sailing to the mainland.

Whichever way you get to Hawaii it's a great place to spend a few days on a cruise. You may find one that ultimately you want to go spend a week enjoying at some point in the future. If it is a first visit to Hawaii the cruise can serve as an island picker.

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

More Old World Sights when cruising Europe.



Will Prepaying my hotel save any money?

There are now many ways to save money while traveling. One method that has come up more lately is prepaying hotel stays either thru consolidators that we as agents can access or in some cases directly with hotel sites. In either case generally the decision to prepay leads to a fully non-refundable fee paid to the hotel in exchange for a small discount.

In my experience the hotel consolidators we access offer the

best deals on prepaid hotel rooms. These deals often are an additional 10-20% below the lowest rate on the hotel web site. The reason this can happen and not violate the hotel website lowest rate guarantee is the fact these are non-published rates requiring prepayment.

I generally avoid using prepaid rates when travel plans are not 100% firm and could easily change, given the cost of the room is not refundable and be-

comes a cancellation penalty. Of course if you take travel insurance and the cancellation is for a covered reason that cancellation fee may be recovered, just be sure that cost is included in the insured trip amount.

When we are helping you with your next trip if you would like to prepay a hotel for some savings be sure to let us know so we can see if we are able to pull in additional savings thru prepayment.

Brooks Cruise Services

11606 Highgrove Dr
Houston, TX 77077

Phone: 713-429-1487
Fax: 281-946-5113
E-mail:
David@BrooksCruiseServices.com

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.

Travel Insurance is it worth the cost?

On my recent Alaska cruise I watched an ambulance take someone from another ship to a medical evacuation plane from one of the small town ports of call. Thus, the very simple answer is yes travel insurance is worth the cost. Whatever happened to the individual who took ill or was injured, will leave thousands of dollars in bills just getting them to the hospital for care. Depending on where you are, or are from, health insurance may not cover a lot of those if any costs associated with the evacuation.

There are so many reasons that travel insurance is beneficial for the purchaser. Good carriers will provide concierge services to help make plans at the destination which are beyond what many travel agents will do. This is a nice value add service, but it can also make the difference if planning a very special occasion at the destination. Additionally these services are useful in locating physicians in remote areas if that becomes necessary.

Should your luggage go missing the insurance companies have departments who specialize in tracking and returning lost luggage. This is useful if you plan to be busy at the destination and don't want to spend time tracking it yourself.

When you trip encounters delays, the traveler assistance team at the insurer can really make the difference on when you get to your destination along with helping secure alternate accommodations where necessary. This is valuable for those who are trying to ensure they make it to a cruise departure when travel delays occur.

The actual cost of travel insurance varies based on the length and cost of trip, age of traveler, and sometimes where they are going. The other big factor is what kind of policy is selected. Various policies offer different levels of coverage from very basic coverage to complete coverage for pretty much every imaginable event.

The various insurance carriers each take a different approach to what is included as

covered events choosing to either narrowly define or broadly define what is a covered event. They also vary greatly in what is excluded from coverage. The other key factor differentiating the carriers is how they handle pre-existing conditions. All of these together are very important as together they define how your policy will work when you need it.

A good agent will help understand the needs you want to ensure are covered and will make sure that your policy covers those needs. There is no single policy that best meets everyone's needs all of the time. A few policies do a good job of providing general overall coverage, but even with those it may be necessary to include riders to bump up certain aspects of the policy to levels needed or desired.

Travel Insurance pays off. We are here to help you pick the right policy to ensure your coverage is adequate for the travel you will undertake.