



Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: Cruises

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Welcome

Cruises are gaining in popularity as a site for meetings. Companies like Norwegian Cruise Lines, Regent (formerly Radisson Cruises) and Cunard are offering enhanced services to their clients planning meetings at sea.

Shari Wallack from Buy the Sea joins me this month in providing the latest information and perspective on meeting while sailing. Shari has worked in the cruise industry for a number of years. She has put her years of experience to work for her -- now providing clients with unbiased recommendations on cruise products. Buy the Sea's goal is to provide the best available rates and information on cruise and all-inclusive products throughout the world.

I invite you to contact Shari Wallack at shari@buy-the-sea.com or 954-424-8649. [Shari Wallack](#) More information on Buy the Sea can be found at their website www.buy-the-sea.com. [Buy the Sea](#).

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Which Ship to Board

Finding the right cruise line is a matter of considering three variables:

- Budget
- Number of days
- Number of people

However, when you also require meeting space, you need to include other considerations. While many cruise lines have made a conscious decisions to support "meetings, your needs for the meeting will dictate whether a cruise ship is an acceptable option.

Determine a fit between your meeting and any cruise line by considering these variables:

- A/V - needs and sophistication
- Meeting rooms - number and size
- Level of confidentiality - importance
- Time - duration of meetings
- Financial impact - especially tax considerations
- Balance - between leisure and meeting time

Charting a Successful Meeting

There are 5 ways to utilize a ship for meetings and events:

- Incentive trips
- Traditional meetings
- Pre- or post-meeting add-ons
- Charters
- Accommodations in cities with tight supply of sleeping rooms. During the Super Bowl in 2005, NFL corporate sponsors filled 3667 cabins aboard docked ships in Jacksonville.

Cruises have been effective meeting sites for:

- Incentives
- Corporate or association anniversary celebrations
- Conferences
- Product launches

With cruise lines marketing meeting space, here are 6 key questions to ask:

1. Does the itinerary mesh with your meeting schedule? Ideally, your meeting will meet when the ship is at sea and not in port.
2. Does the cruise line niche match your group's age, interests and expectations?
3. What public spaces are available for private events or meetings?
4. Do you require lots of break-out space? Do you have detailed A/V needs? Do you require many room turnarounds? Cruises are best suited for general sessions, executive meetings, and award presentations.
5. Can you and your group effectively capitalize on the available space? Many groups find that a cruises offer spaces that have more atmosphere and are less sterile than meeting rooms.
6. Are you and your group willing to think outside the box?

If your requirements fit into a meeting at sea, there are many benefits that can be realized.

Meeting Benefits:

- Security - The list of people at/on the venue are limited to the passenger list.
- A somewhat captive audience - When at sea, people are confined to the ship.
- Trained A/V staff - Staff is usually available at no cost
- Teambuilding - Ships offer a range of activities that are suited for teambuilding aboard ships.
- Built in entertainment - After the meeting is over, there are a multitude of entertainment options right on board.

Participant Benefits:

- Unique- The Cruise Line International Association study (2005) indicated that only 16% of the US population has ever been on a cruise.
- Bonding - The cruise experience allows people to bond with each other in unique ways.
- Many options- Pools, spas, health clubs, enrichment activities, theaters and dining options guarantee there is something for everyone.
- Food flexibility - Cruises now offer more than the set-dinner option with flexibility in dining options, dining time, and specialized restaurants.
- Resort-level luxury - Cruises often boast a tremendous attention to detail and offer luxury found in four- or five -star resorts.

Benefits for the planner:

- All inclusive pricing - Meals, coffee breaks, standard A/V and entertainment are included in the cruise price which makes budgeting easier. Inclusive pricing typically includes additional food and beverage fees for meals held in meeting

space

- New ports of departure - Up to 30 ports of embarkment can minimize air fare costs.
- Lower taxes - Tax rates are lower on services on cruises. From the IRS perspective, a word of caution: Tax rules and exemptions for events held on cruise ships differ from those held on US soil. Check with a tax expert or attorney for details about how your event will be treated.
- Non-union labor - Most labor is included and is non-union.
- Staging and lighting - Cruises have elaborate staging and lighting which can be made available to your group for no additional charge.
- Exchange rate values - Cruise fees are billed in US dollars.
- Minimizes ancillary expenses - There is little need to invest in additional details like décor or flowers.

On the other side, cruises do have some disadvantages;

- Less flexibility (timing, scheduling public space, strict departure times)
- Strict contracting as it relates to payments, attribution clauses, and force majeure

Smooth Sailing

Many cruises offer the following features to support meetings:

- Technically sophisticated A/V equipment
- Wi-Fi access
- Internet cafes
- Large ballroom spaces
- Conference spaces
- Lounges potentially convertible for presentations and award ceremonies
- Multi-level amphitheaters
- Movie theaters that can be used for lectures

To insure smooth sailing for your meeting:

- Book in advance
- Prepare your attendees (seasickness, emergencies, strict departure times)
- Prepare for meeting surprises - For example, at sea it is impossible to request extra A/V equipment.
- Reserve a restaurant or deck for a private event
- Book rooms on a specific level to create a feeling of togetherness for your group
- Block space for popular land excursions early
- Remember when the ship is scheduled to leave, it leaves

Make it your own

Perhaps you have never considered chartering a ship for your own use. Options exist for charters including:

- Creating a cruise in the gap between published cruise schedule dates. While some of the dates when the ship does not appear to be sailing are designated for maintenance, those gaps in the schedule could be dedicated to charters.
- Chartering a smaller ship
- Chartering a non-traditional vessel like a barge or river boat

Chartering is an option for as few as 50 people up to 1500. Shari Wallack adds this advice:

Chartering is easier than you think, but it's going to be more expensive in most cases than placing a group on a regularly scheduled voyage on a larger ship.

Also, chartering also takes more planning. Shari advises to book at least 18 months out to get exactly what you want.

Some cruise lines will offer half-charters. Others place limits on the percentage for groups versus leisure retail customers.

Charting offers these advantages:

- Exclusivity - There is no mixing of retail guests on the same sailing as corporate clients.
- Ultimate security - The only people on the ship will be your own group and staff.
- Extreme flexibility - Itineraries, onboard program, meal times, use of your logo, and seating arrangements are some of the elements that will be customized for your group.
- Special ports - Especially for smaller vessels, the trip can include ports of call that may be unreachable by larger vessels

Contract Differences

Contracting with a hotel is different than contracting with a cruise lines. Shari Wallack offers this advice:

Charter contracts are somewhat complicated, but buying space on a regular ship is actually very simple. The contract is typically no more than 2-3 pages long, at the very most. The only substantial difference is that with a hotel, you can cancel a good portion of your rooms very close in. You're also not required to pay the entire cost in advance. With a cruise, you are required to prepay 60 days out. There are attrition clauses that allow you to cancel a specific number of cabins within 60 days, but they can often be somewhat stringent.

Freebies: [Zagat's of the Sea](#)

Freebies: [Cruise Reviews](#)

One valuable service Wallack provides to planners is updated reviews of more than 20 cruise vessels. The reviews, some of which are by corporate meeting planners, offer useful information that will help you choose the right cruise. You can read her reviews on Wallack's Buy The Sea website at www.buy-the-sea.com. [Buy the Sea](#).

More Freebies: Email me for the Shari's advice on conducting site inspections. [Ship Site Inspections](#)

Future T.I.M.E.

Thanks to the great audience I had at [Affordable Meetings West](#) in Long Beach, California.

I will also be at [EMC's MEET - Washington DC](#) during July 20 & 21 at the Inn & Conference Center at University of Maryland University College by Marriott in Adelphia, MD. Here is the website with more details:
<http://guest.cvent.com/EVENTS/Info/Summary.aspx?e=6d7e5900-bf6f-49fc-9699-fb0cbc085be2> or click here [EMC Venues MEET](#)

On November 15, I will be at the [Society of Government Meeting Planners Michigan Chapter](#) in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

I love to see familiar faces in the audience. Please come and see me.

Finally, my subscriber base only grows through word of mouth of my subscribers. I would really appreciate it if you would forward T.I.M.E. onto your colleagues, associates, and clients. Just press the forward button at the end of the newsletter.

T.I.M.E. Gone By

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2001

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2002

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2003

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2004

Branding (January), Audio Visuals (February), Networking (March), Strategic Budgeting (April), Sensory Meetings (May), Board Meetings (June), Leadership (July), Barrier-free Meetings (August), Time Management & Meetings (September), The Travel Experience & Stress (October), Voting Techniques (November), Deja View II (December)

2005

New Year's Resolutions (January), Brainy Side of Food and Beverage (February), Sarbanes-Oxley and Meetings (March), Visual Aids (April), Experiential Teambuilding (May), Emotional Meetings (June), Press Conferences (July), Green Meetings (August), International Meetings (September), Value of Entertainment (October), Copyright Laws (November), Deja View III (December)

2006

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