

# Shipboard Meetings and Events

## Take Your Meeting Out to Sea



By Tamara Muldoon

You've been tasked with arranging a planning retreat for the executive staff, or maybe you are planning an incentive trip to reward your company's top performers. This event needs to be special, something extraordinary. Have you considered booking it on board a cruise ship?



American Cruise Lines

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**WHY MEET ON A SHIP?**

Cruises offer all-inclusive per-person fees covering accommodations, meals, meeting space, taxes and gratuities. Cruise ships have a variety of spaces that can be reserved for private functions. Meals, some beverages, and even meeting break refreshments are included, although a set-up fee may be charged for meeting room food service. Standard audiovisual equipment is usually included at no charge.

Most ships offer facilities and activities for attendees' free time such as a fitness center, health spa, swimming pools, lounges with entertainment, specialty restaurants and boutique shops plus on-board recreation and off-ship excursions. Cruises take your group to multiple destinations, enriching the experience. Shipboard meetings offer a unique and memorable environment and luxurious amenities for one simple package price.

Ships can accommodate business events like incentive award travel, corporate meetings, retreats, sales meetings, training or continuing education classes, and themed cruises for special interest groups as well as reunions and weddings.

**COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS**

Decision makers might balk at the suggestion of a shipboard meeting, thinking that cruise ships are

“party boats” and not conducive to business events. However, some ships have dedicated meeting rooms designed specifically to accommodate private events.

Cruises are perceived as expensive, but compared with the same services on shore, they can actually be less expensive. According to Florida-based cruise event planning company Landry & Kling, shipboard meetings can cost up to 30 percent less than land-based all-expenses-paid events.

There may be concerns about seasickness, illness or other safety issues. Large ships have built-in stabilizers, and smaller ships sailing coastal and inland waterways experience little movement that would cause motion sickness. Cruise ships are highly regulated and undergo routine safety inspections and drills. Larger ships also have on-board medical staff and facilities.

**ON-BOARD VENUES**

Cruise vessels run the gamut from mega-ships carrying several thousand passengers, to intimate yacht-like craft accommodating two dozen. The size and age of the ship dictates what meeting space is available on board. Some ships have rooms specifically designed for meetings, with flexible seating and audiovisual equipment.

All ships have lounges with casual seating that might meet your needs. Movie theaters and performance halls on larger ships offer theater-style seating, high-tech audio and lighting. These can be a welcome change from the typical meeting room environment. Most ships have outdoor areas available for group functions as well. But, remember that these public spaces are used by other passengers, so you will need to plan your agenda around the ship's schedule.

**CHOOSING A SHIP**

There are many factors to consider when choosing a cruise line and ship. First and foremost is budget. Luxury ship cruises usually include everything: alcoholic beverages, shore excursions, specialty restaurant dining and more. Premium level includes most services, but often charge extra for

**CONNECT**

These cruise lines all offer service to Alaska

**Celebrity Cruises**

1-800-722-5934  
celebritycorporatekit.com

**Carnival**

1-877-278-0388  
corporatesales@carnival.com  
carnivalmeetings.com

**Holland America**

1-877-885-4259  
onboardeventservices@hollandamerica.com  
hollandamerica.com

**Norwegian Cruise Line**

1-866-NCL-MEET or 305-436-4465  
events@ncl.com  
ncl.com

**Oceania Cruises**

305-514-4920  
events@oceaniacruises.com  
oceaniacruises.com

**Royal Caribbean**

1-800-345-7225  
royalmeetingsandincentives@rccl.com  
royalcaribbeanincentives.com

**UnCruise Adventures**

1-855-575-9358, 1-888-862-8881  
groups@uncruise.com  
uncruise.com

**Windstar Cruises**

800-628-3354  
chartersandincentives@windstarcruises.com  
windstarcruises.com

**CEALS - Corporate Events and Leisure Services LLC**

Jerry Vaughn, President  
253-661-7199 option 2  
information@meetingsonships.com  
meetingsonships.com  
incentiveprogramsonships.com



Windstar Cruises (here and at right)

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some beverages, excursions and gratuities; however, your company could pick up the tab for these expenses if desired.

Small ships have fewer facilities, designed for off-ship exploring rather than on-board entertainment, yet still include most services in the fare. Prices vary depending upon the length of cruise, level of service and crew-to-passenger ratio.

Consider the size of your group relative to the ship's capacity. Will your group of 40 feel overwhelmed on a vessel built for 2,000? Or, would you rather be on a small ship where you are the focus of attention? You might even consider chartering a small ship and having it all to yourselves.

Investigate the ship's usual passenger demographics and focus of activities, as this varies between companies and ships. Is it geared toward young, active passengers seeking excitement and nightlife; a more moderate crowd interested in sightseeing and culture; or the casual, adventurous sort seeking outdoor experiences like kayaking, hiking and wildlife viewing?

Cruise length is also a factor. Many cruises are one or two weeks long. Some cruise lines offer shorter three or four-day itineraries which are popular for on-board meetings. Think about how the cruise itinerary might fit with your agenda. Can you schedule your meetings to allow attendees to participate in shore excursions or other on-board activities? Do you need to utilize public spaces at times when they are not in use by other passengers?



### A FEW DIFFERENCES

There are some differences between planning a shipboard event and one held in a hotel or conference center. Booking your group on a cruise may require more than the usual lead time, especially during peak season, if you have a large group or wish to arrange a private charter.

Your on-board event will initially be coordinated with an on-shore group coordinator. The ship's crew will likely not receive your program details until just before sailing, and there is seldom a dedicated on-board meeting support person. Plan to send someone along to be the group's event coordinator.

Cruise accommodations are sold primarily on a double-occupancy basis, with a premium fee added for



Norwegian Cruise Lines



Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines

single occupancy. Unless spouses or companions are invited, will you require participants to share rooms, or will you pay a single-supplement fee for each room?

**CONSIDER OUTSOURCING**

If this all seems too complicated, consider working with an event planning company that specializes in shipboard meetings, such as Corporate Events and Leisure Services LLC (CEALS), based in Federal Way, Washington. Like a travel agent, these companies are compensated by the cruise line, so there is no cost to your group unless you contract for

add-on services such as registration or marketing.

“Planning a shipboard event is different than planning a cruise vacation,” says Jerry Vaughn, president of CEALS. “Doing an event on a cruise ship can be an exciting, enjoyable and productive endeavor that is a good value for the money if done on an appropriately suited ship with the right facilities and price point for your organization. Utilizing the services of an experienced professional will save you money, grief and allow you to concentrate your efforts on your primary job,” adds Vaughn.

**DESTINATIONS AND PORTS OF CALL**

For the Pacific Northwest, Alaska is the most visited destination, with both large and small ships servicing the region. Tours depart from Seattle, Washington, or Vancouver, British Columbia, traversing the famed Inside Passage. Cruises also sail from some Alaskan ports, with one-way or round-trip itineraries. Ports of call may include Victoria, BC; Juneau, Ketchikan, Wrangell, Skagway, Haines, Petersburg, or Sitka in Alaska; or a visit to Glacier Bay National Park. **M**



Oceania Cruises in Alaska

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