

# Smooth Sailing

TIPS TO KEEP YOUR NEXT CRUISE SHIP SHAPE

BY LYNNE R. CHRISTEN

**L**ooking for the ultimate escape far away from daily doldrums and demands? It's time to run away to sea. According to the most recent Cruise Lines International Association Executive Summary, more than 50 million North Americans express a strong interest in cruising in the next three years. Keeping up with consumer demand between 2011 and 2015, 26 new vessels, ranging from ocean-going to riverboats, will join fleets sailing to more than 2,000 ports around the world.

Close to home, five Florida cruise ports and the Port of New Orleans offer destination diversity and added-value deals that are strong enticements to sail away.

#### MAKING THE BEST CRUISE MATCH

There is no "one size fits all" when it comes to cruising. Cruising is all about choices. Ready to rock-around-the-clock or seeking serenity? Like to dress up or dress down? Tight travel budget or able to splurge? Choosing a destination, cruise line and cruise ship that matches personal style and budget is the first step to finding the best cruise.

It pays to do some homework. Visit cruise line websites and note which companies and ships offer appealing activities and entertainment choices. Read online cruise reviews. Ask frequent cruisers for recommendations. Surveys show that the majority of cruisers rely on the services of travel professionals.

Tammy McDaniel, owner of Tammy's Journeys in Fort Walton Beach, has been in the travel industry for nearly 30 years. Her advice: "Create a wish list of what's important to you and work with an experienced travel agent to sort through the myriad of choices for a dream cruise." In addition to helping make the best cruise match, well-connected travel agents like McDaniel sometimes have access to deals not found online. They handle time-consuming logistics of booking flights, pre- or post cruise hotel accommodations, rental cars and travel insurance. They also help clients decide where to cut corners and how to stretch travel budgets. And they often score perks, such as upgrades and unused credits. Most important, McDaniel says, "We are in the client's corner if something goes awry."



#### LYNNE CHRISTEN'S CRUISING MYTH BUSTERS

##### MYTH: Cruising is too expensive

Actually, cruising is one of the best vacation value. Many cruises are \$100 and per person, per day for a cabin with private balcony.

##### MYTH: Cruises are for old people

This image of cruise travel is outdated. In fact, the longer the cruise, the older the cruisers.

##### MYTH: Cruises are too structured

On the contrary, today's cruises offer "free-style" everything, allowing you choice meal options and activities.

##### MYTH: You don't get to see enough on cruises

True, you can't see all of the world in one day. But cruises are a wonderful way to sample destinations that you might never see otherwise.

Source: "101 Cruise Tips."