

ITINERARY PLANNING: AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE OVERALL CRUISE EXPERIENCE

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Cruising continues to grow at an unprecedented rate – a record 6.9 million passengers set sail in 2000 -- a whopping 19 percent increase over 1999.

One of the reasons behind this tremendous rise in popularity is that cruising offers a truly hassle-free vacation experience, providing guests with the unique opportunity

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to visit a diversity of sightseeing destinations in a single voyage. Without the need to pack and unpack or rush through airports, guests can just sit back and relax while their "floating resort" takes them to a variety of sunny, exotic ports of call, each

cally different from a land vacation.

Given the importance of itinerary in vacationers’ decision-making process, it’s no wonder why cruise lines go to great lengths to assemble itineraries that appeal to consumers and ultimately generate revenue for the company. But what exactly goes into determining a ship’s itinerary?

Obviously, a port’s amenities and attractions – beaches, historical sites, ecotourism opportunities, shopping, snorkeling, watersports, etc. – are of prime importance, as they are first and foremost in consumers’ minds when considering a vacation.

gleaned from word-of-mouth referrals, travel agents, advertising or sales brochures.

The perception of a destination in con-



A group of passengers depart in Antigua

sumers’ minds, reinforced by the port’s own intensive marketing efforts, ultimately leads to a top-of-mind awareness about the destination and increases its "marquis value" to both consumers and the cruise industry as a whole.

While not immediately apparent to consumers, issues such as infrastructure and logistics also play a key role in itinerary selection. Not only must the port possess

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strong consumer appeal, it also must offer adequate transportation between the port and attractions, sufficient docking space, convenient fuel and water hook-ups, and

Equally important, however, is the overall perception of the destination itself – i.e. its "marquis value." Guest satisfaction is paramount to cruise operators and a destination with strong name recognition makes it that much easier to market an itinerary to potential vacationers.

The industry is carrying more first-time cruisers than ever, meaning that, more than likely, guests have never visited the destinations on their ship’s itinerary, basing their opinions instead on information



Ships docked in Nassau.

offering its own cultures, sites and attractions. It’s what makes cruising so dramatic

qualified vendors in a variety of business sectors for provisioning purposes.

The availability and variety of organized shore excursions is another key element in itinerary planning. Local tour operators must not only be qualified and offer their services at reasonable prices, they must also be accessible and willing to work with the cruise operators in setting schedules, transferring guests to and from the ship and various other logistical issues.

Other factors such as costs associated with visiting the port – dockage fees, head taxes, etc. are also considered when planning an itinerary. Port officials must also demonstrate a willingness to work with the cruise lines to enhance the overall port experience, improve infrastructure and develop new and different tourism opportunities.

Even a ship’s speed plays a role in itinerary planning, as it determines whether a vessel



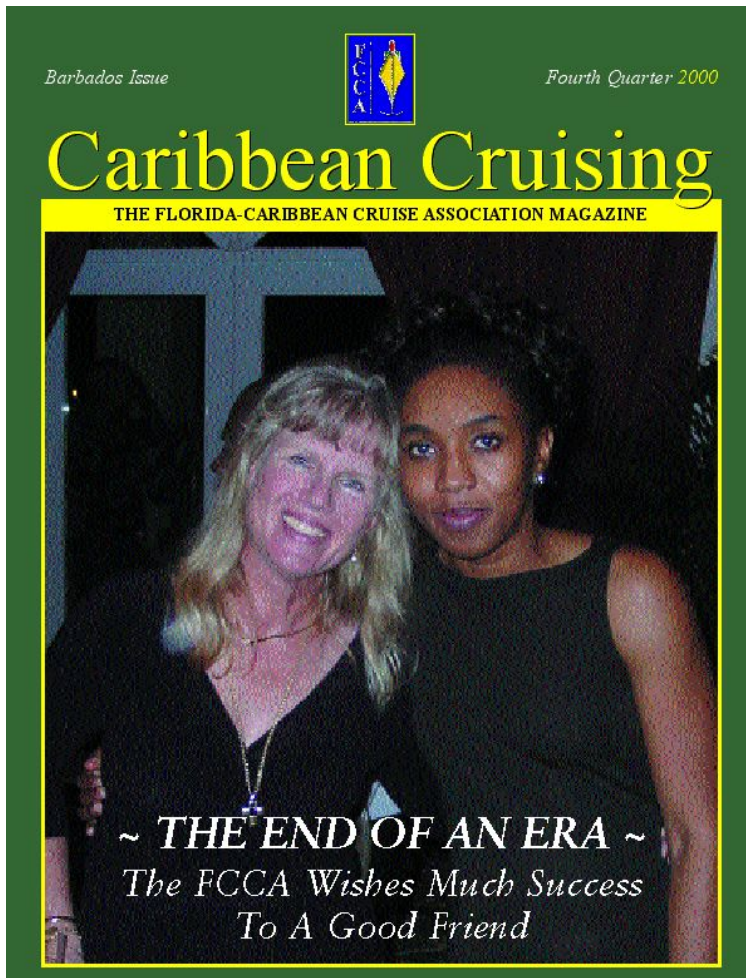
of safety and security of a cruise lines’ guests and crew must be provided before a cruise operator can even consider committing to a particular port-of-call.

As you can see, there is no single reason why a cruise line chooses a port but rather the collective sum of a number of factors, each of which plays a critical role in an itinerary’s overall success. To have strong tourist appeal without the necessary infrastructure – or vice versa – greatly diminishes a port’s attractiveness to itinerary planners.

can reach the destination in a timely fashion, allow for sufficient time for guests to visit the various attractions and return to the port of embarkation in time for the next cruise.

And it goes without saying that assurances

A ship’s itinerary is an integral part of the overall cruise experience. We in the cruise industry look forward to working with our port partners in creating new and exciting schedules that provide guests a broad spectrum of experiences while making a positive economic impact to the destinations themselves. ♀



Julie-Anne Burrowes recently left the FCCA to return to her home country, Barbados. She has accepted a position with Tall Ships, an FCCA Platinum Member.