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Cruising — Dreamy Boats and Garbage Dumping: Cameron on Transportation

Author : David Gurliacci

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Stuck in traffic on I-95? Wouldn't you rather be sitting on a deck chair on a cruise ship somewhere warm?

It was the Cunard line that first marketed long distance ship travel with the phrase "getting there is half the fun." And in those days, it was. Now, with the exception of trans-Atlantic crossings, most cruise ships end up right where they began.

Over 23 million people hop aboard a cruise each year, half of them Americans. And most of them are repeat sailors. The market keeps growing with new mega-ships being added to the fleets and now, a long-awaited destination: Cuba!

Havana Room Here?

With the partial lifting of the U.S. trade embargo, the big cruise lines are all jockeying for access to this once-forbidden island. Royal Caribbean just announced weekly sailings from Miami and Tampa, though the ship only spends a single day in Havana.

The problem is too many ships and too little dock space. Plus, the tourist infrastructure on the island can't really support mega-ships disgorging 5000 passengers at once.

Still, cruising to Cuba is probably a better way to enjoy the island than staying ashore given the shortage of quality hotels and transport. So look for more ships and better choices of ports and tours in the months to come — if Trump doesn't undo the efforts at diplomatic reconciliation.

Competition on the Horizon

The Carnivals, Norwegian Cruise Lines and Royal Caribbeans of the cruise world are about to taste some new competition: Sir Richard Branson is building three new ships, hoping to do for cruising what he did decades back for air travel.

Virgin Voyages (not Cruises) will be run by Tom McAlpin who helped launch Disney's vessels and more recently was CEO of "The World," the largest private yacht (actually a ship) which sails all year with 165 owner-occupied residences on board.

Virgin hopes to take a fresh approach to cruising, appealing to millennials who think that cruising is for older "blue hairs." They've even launched a crowd-sourcing effort to ask customers what they'd like if they were designing the ships. The first of the 2,800-passenger ships will sail from Miami in 2020.

One of Virgin's attractions to the young set is a pledge of environmental protections, long a problem on the oceans where ships regularly would discharge garbage, chemicals and oily bilge water. (If you're interested in the dark history of the cruise industry, [I can highly recommend](#) Kristopher Garrin's 2005 book "Devils on the Deep Blue Sea")

Waste Dumps

We thought the industry had that problem under control until news came last month that prestigious Princess Cruise Lines was being fined \$40 million after pleading guilty to seven felony counts for [intentionally polluting the ocean](#).

It seems that engineers on the 3,192-passenger Caribbean Princess built what they called "the magic pipe" deep in the bowels of the ship and used it to discharge 4,227 gallons of oily waste off the coast of England. A whistleblower reported the crime, which was immediately covered up by senior officers who forged log books and then made the "magic pipe" disappear.

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The cruise line's management says it was all the work of well intentioned, cost-conscious subordinates. The senior officers involved in the scheme have all been fired and Princess's parent, Carnival (which is no stranger to controversy) is under a five year court-monitored environmental compliance program with independent audits of all its vessels.

Princess also said, "We are very sorry."

Jim Cameron has been a Darien resident for 25 years. He is the founder of the Commuter Action Group and also serves on the Darien RTM. The opinions expressed in this column are only his own. You can reach him at CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com

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