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## **I Can't Imagine the Cruise Ship Industry Disappearing. At Least, I Hope Not: Cameron on Transportation**

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Have you ever taken a cruise? According to that industry, something like 28 million people worldwide took to the high seas last year. But that still leave 80% of Americans who have never cruised, enjoying the midnight buffets, spas and casinos at sea.

Even before the current pandemic cruise ships were notorious hotspots for simpler bugs like the norovirus which caused “acute gastrointestinal illness.” It’s hard to share a confined space like a ship without touching surfaces that harbor the virus.

Years ago when we sailed on NCL we practically bathed in hand sanitizer. You couldn’t board without a hand spritz or even think about eating. The dispensers were everywhere, compliance was high and we never got sick.

Now, cruising is on lockdown by order of the CDC for at least another three months though it looks like the White House is aiding the ailing industry by shortening the time before they can weigh anchor — assuming they can find passengers.

Because most cruise ships are not registered in the U.S., the operators were locked out of the government’s \$2 trillion aid package. But what’s become of the ships and their crews?

As of this writing there are about 100 cruise ships either docked or floating at sea staffed with 80,000 crew members caught in limbo. Some of them have contracted the COVID-19 and are sick but can’t be taken ashore. Most of them are still getting paid, others not.

The onboard entertainment for passengers has been retuned to keep up staff morale. And the fancy buffets have been replaced with simpler fare as the big ships now need to be resupplied while still at sea.

But what will happen to the cruise industry “after” COVID-19? It depends mostly on the ship owners and the CDC. Among the recommendations: eliminate self-service food buffets, sanitize endlessly, increase air filtration for cabins lacking fresh air, constant illness testing for crew and passengers and reduced capacity onboard to allow social distancing.

Even with those measures the question is *Will the customers come back?* Cruising used to be fun and pretty inexpensive, but the industry’s mishandling of the COVID crisis is the kind of bad PR that will take months or years to overcome.

Among the first to cruise (and fly) will be those who’ve survived the virus and have documentation to prove it (COVID Cards, I call them). Presumably they’ll be immune to reinfection and won’t be contagious.

But will the ports welcome the ships, especially those coming from the world’s COVID hotspot, the United States? As travel consultant Peter Greenberg points out, it wasn’t that many years ago that international travelers had to carry a yellow immunization card, signed by their doctors, proving they were up to date on all their shots. That’s an idea that is sure to return.

There’s a lot hanging in the balance of this industry’s return to business. We’re talking about thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in business for the U.S. and international ports’ economies. I can’t imagine all of that disappearing. At least I hope not.

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*Jim Cameron has been a Darien resident for more than 25 years. He is the founder of the [Commuter Action Group](#), sits on the [Merritt Parkway Conservancy](#) board and also serves on the Darien RTM and as program director for Darien TV79. The opinions expressed in this column, republished with permission of Hearst CT Media, are only his own. You can reach him at [CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com](mailto:CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com).*