

WELCOME TO NICHE CRUISING...

Welcome to the Niche Cruise Marketing Alliance (NCMA). The NCMA is a collection of cruise lines that provide some of the finest travel experiences available in the travel industry today. Our purpose is to increase awareness in the agent community about the concept of niche cruises. We want to get the message out to travel agents everywhere that there are profitable alternatives to the standard Caribbean cruise, or the typical mass-market cruise.

The assortment of products you will find on the pages that follow range from yacht-like sailing vessels to medium-sized classic cruise ships. Our partners can take you to some of the most exotic places on earth. Discover the wilds of the Arctic, the paradise of the South Pacific, or the magic of the Mediterranean. Explore the unique cultures and history found along the rivers of Europe and the great waterways of North America.

Although the journeys provided by our niche cruise members may be different, they do have several common traits. First and foremost is that they provide more intimate experiences than the larger cruise lines.

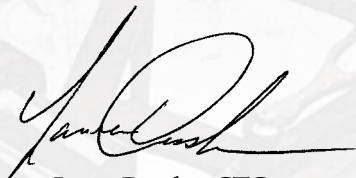
Smaller ships can also cruise to remote destinations that the larger cruise lines cannot venture to. For example, cruise lines like Star Clippers can take passengers to some of the most secluded and pristine locales in the Mediterranean, French Polynesia and the Far East.

Niche cruise lines also place personal enrichment and environmental preservation high on their agendas. For this reason, NCMA lines are heavily destination-focused with unique itineraries and shore excursions.

Canodros' *Galapagos Explorer II* takes this idea to the next level, offering spectacular Galapagos Islands cruising. Guests receive the unique opportunity to encounter the world's most exotic species of animals up close, including iguanas, giant tortoises, whales, sea lions and a dizzying array of birds. Suites aboard the *Galapagos Explorer II* feature queen beds, marble baths, refrigerator bars, televisions and wireless internet access. On a typical 7-night cruise the ship visits up to 10 islands of the archipelago.

Across the Atlantic in Europe, Imperial River Cruises plies the scenic rivers of Russia and the Ukraine, bringing this region's historic and cultural treasures to thousands of North American travelers. Closer to home, American Cruise Lines is taking guests along the scenic coast of New England and the historic South. These are but a few examples of the wealth of vacation experiences available from the NCMA. Please read on for more information on our partners and enjoy!

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Larry Dessler, CTC
*Executive Director
Niche Cruise Marketing Alliance*

BECOMING A NICHE CRUISE SPECIALIST AND ADDING VALUE TO YOUR SALES

There are so many excellent reasons why travel agents should be selling niche cruises this year. Not only are they unique and more profitable, but they also provide agents with a competitive edge. Perhaps most importantly, in this era of consolidation and concentration, selling niche cruises can be an excellent insurance policy for the future.

By selling the cruise vacations that members of the Niche Cruise Marketing Alliance offer, travel agents can begin to build a foundation of repeat business and cement lifetime relationships with their customers. Unlike in mass-market cruises, there are not 30,000 other agents and the Internet, discounting and selling the same product. Agents can develop a relationship with smaller cruise lines who truly want their business and reward them appropriately for their hard work. Most niche lines start agents off at a healthy 10-14 percent commission.

Moreover, niche lines are perfect for agents who do a significant amount of group business. Often, large groups have needs and demands that are best served by smaller lines. For example,

a group of 50 people is highly sought after. And, travel agents can rest assured that these clients will be catered to and pampered during their voyage.

Online Training

At the Niche Cruise Marketing Alliance we want to provide information and training to allow agents to satisfy the interests of their market with programs that go beyond standard cruise offerings. As a Niche Cruise Specialist, travel agents demonstrate their specialized knowledge in this exciting product category and take advantage of the revenue potential it represents. For more information on becoming a Niche Cruise Specialist, please visit www.nichecruise.com or email NicheCruise@msn.com. Several NCMA members have their own on-line training sites.



Why Sell Niche Cruises?

- **You'll earn greater profits.**

Studies show that customers for niche products spend 30-40 percent more on their purchases than other client-types do. This is because value is more important for niche cruisers than cost. Commission rates on the sale of niche cruises tend to be especially generous as well.

- **You'll gain repeat customers.**

When people who purchase a niche product are pleased, they become loyal to the person who recommended it to them.

- **Less competition.**

Let others limit themselves to the same mass-market cruises.

- **Nothing beats that personal touch.**

Your niche cruise partners will really get to know you. They pay attention to those who sell them. They *want* a relationship with you. They'll even return your calls. To them, each agent who understands their product is important.

SPECIALTY CRUISING – HOW BIG IS THE MARKET?



Believe it or not, there's good news – the market for specialty cruising today is larger than ever before. With the travel industry experiencing an excellent rebound and a new generation of cruise aficionados coming into their own, niche cruises can be the perfect vacation for both first-time cruisers and discerning travelers.

The largest market can be found, of course, among baby boomers who are now reaching the age where they are demanding more experiences from their holidays. They've traveled to Europe, been to the Caribbean and enjoyed the larger cruise lines, but now they're looking for something *more* – a truly unique trip to an exotic locale – a vacation with their families that they'll always cherish and memories that will last a lifetime. This is the very essence of specialty cruising.

When analyzing the niche cruise market it's imperative to recognize that approximately twice the number of people who cruise take land-tours. Yet, travelers who prefer to take land-tours can still be prime candidates for niche cruising. There are several reasons for this. First, itineraries for both land-tours and niche cruises are often more flexible and easier to plan. Also, similarly to land-tours, niche cruises provide more "destination immersion."



Passengers on a niche cruise don't have to worry about seeing an entire city in five hours before rushing back to their ship. For example, NCMA partner Star Clippers, which offers mega-yacht sailings in the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, guarantees its passengers a relaxed cruise. For them, the notion of a strict schedule aboard their vessels is a foreign one.

Niche cruise lines are also great options for those interested in wildlife cruising, which has seen a boom in popularity in recent years.

Hurtigruten has cruised Scandinavia's fjord-filled waters for over 100 years, giving its passengers up-close views of whales, polar bears, puffins and other arctic wildlife. Hurtigruten targets its highly flexible vacation packages towards the independent minded travelers who are also looking for a little adventure.

Finally, niche cruise lines are especially adept at tending to group needs as well. Virtually all of the cruise lines you're about to read about provide big ship amenities in an intimate atmosphere. For groups that are looking for a little privacy, this can be a big selling point. Also, smaller vessels have an excellent guest to crew ratio, allowing for attentive service and a personal touch that cannot be surpassed by larger cruise lines.

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CHASING GROUP PROFITS



You have been there before and so have many of your fellow group promoters. You followed the rules, negotiated your group, started your promotion and were starting to harvest your bookings and then it happened.

The telephone call informs you that the cruise that you have been promoting is available on the Internet at a price lower than what you are capable of matching. Or worse, you open your Sunday newspaper and find that the same cruise that you had committed to six months before and have spent hundreds, possibly thousands of dollars promoting, is advertised at bargain basement prices. You quickly reach for your phone and call your cruise line business development manager and scream.



There was a time when cruise lines used to protect you and the rate. They did the right thing and recognized your investment in the promotion of their product, but not now. So who suffers? You do.

How can you protect yourself from this kind of embarrassment and risk? It is simple and it is evolutionary. What you need to do is find those products that still need and want to service the group marketplace. You need to specialize and dig a little deeper to get to those products that can and will compensate you for your efforts.



Specialty Cruises Offer the Solution

The group market is extremely important to the growing number of companies offering unique specialty cruise programs. Products that deliver education, discovery, self-improvement programs and ultimate pampering on an individual basis are perfect for the proactive group developer. First of all, you have products

that are unique and committed to the group market. You have product that has substance and cannot be easily duplicated by the mainstream cruise industry.

You have pricing that is stable and cannot take the violent swings that the mainstream cruise industry now considers normal. You have companies that do not have the capability for mass-market consumer promotion. In other words, you have companies that need and want your business.

This represents a perfect scenario for successful group development.

Specialty cruise operators provide the opportunity for your clients to experience destinations in an up-close and personal manner.

Moving to specialty cruise programs just makes sense for the savvy group promoter. Specialty cruise operators provide the opportunity for your clients to experience destinations in an up-close and personal manner. And with the smaller ships of this segment, your clients are never overwhelmed or lose their feeling of traveling with the group.

Group potential is everywhere. What about your local yacht club sailing on a true clipper ship in a club-like setting or exploring the Greek Isles? Closer to home, group opportunities abound with the ability to discover New England and Maryland's Chesapeake Bay.

So, take charge and go back to what has always set the travel agent apart – the ability to add value to the travel experience and provide a unique program for their group clients.

The future is in your hands and you can choose where your resources should be invested and what kind of products you want to be involved in. Consider earning your Niche Cruise Specialist Certificate by visiting www.nichecruise.com or attending one of the Niche Cruise Marketing Alliance seminars. The role of the travel agent is more important today than ever.

