

MAJOR TRENDS ON CRUISE SHIP DESIGN AND NEW SHIP CLASS TYPES

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Abstract

With a relatively recent history, the cruising industry has grown significantly over the years. Nowadays, at over 20 years of the XXI century, in a difficult period, with political instability, lack of confidence in economical unions, economic crisis and Covid 19 pandemic, the cruising industry is still focusing on creating an innovating product, new cruise ships, able to fulfill passengers' needs and wants, as many possible, trying to impress by a modern design and special amenities and facilities, that no one expected to be possible 50 years ago.

In this context, this research aims to underline the newest architectural and design trends of river, sea and ocean cruises, taking into consideration the changes of consumer behavior of cruise passengers.

Keywords: *Cruise line, design, facilities, innovation*

JEL Classification: Z30.

1. Introduction

Over the years, cruising has become a more and more appealing alternative to land-based holidays, with an increasing number of first time cruisers, which are representative for the evolution of the industry.

Cruising has been characterized as one of the fastest growing sectors, as part of travel and tourism industry, as major companies have invested in developing a large number of ships, with high capacity and a variety of facilities onboard.

The various amenities, for different types of travelers combined with new and interesting itineraries have made cruising to be a must try experience. In addition, shore excursions organized in the cruising package represent a plus value for all the customers.

Becoming more popular among tourists, the major companies have increased their actions towards creating different types of ships, with large addressability, themed cruises, with a major accent on facilities and leisure activities, to an extent of an *artificial city*.

As a result, more tourists are choosing ships that provide a complete experience, with emphasis on the ship's features and services, rather than the itinerary itself. This being the case, there is an intense competition among cruise lines to offer a state of the

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art experience, with facilities and design that will delight the actual passengers as well as the potential ones.

2. Cruise industry major trends

All tourism activities have been profoundly influenced by the tourists' consumption habits. Changes have occurred in the travel preferences of tourists, hence the constant adaptation of offers. The modern tourist is nowadays an experience one, with high exigencies in selecting a vacation, far more invested in this process, than ever before. The consequence of the demand's dynamic is also registered in the major trends of cruising industry, to properly meet the traveller's needs and wants.

As previously mentioned, one important trend is represented by selecting the cruise ship as destination, which requires a higher input from companies to deliver high end products and services similar to daily based ones, the customers are familiar to.

Important trends that can be mentioned¹: *instagrammable* cruise travel, instagram feeds with different travel experiences on and off board; *total restoration* with modern wellness facilities; *achievement travel*, experiencing *goal oriented* cruise; *on board smart technology*, *conscious travel*, sustainable travel; *new out of reach destinations*; increase of *Generation Z passengers*; *off season experience*; *combining work with leisure*; *travelling alone* etc.

The spread of Covid 19 pandemic has significantly changed the evolution of cruising industry. As all activity has come to an end in 2020 and the start of cruise travel has encompassed, besides, the previous ones, a series of revival trends for the years to come²:

- On board technology will represent a key element of every activity, with a focus on touchless experience, such as check in online, booking shore excursion or meals and others;
- Out of reach, new destinations; world cruises;
- Off season destinations; tourists are more interested in travelling, therefore off-peak season cruising are expected to be increased as well;
- Women focused cruises, themed cruises for women will rise in popularity, consistent with the trend of solo travelling;
- Instagram travel, this approach of travel, facilities and itineraries through the lens of social media is more and more appealing in selecting a cruise vacation;
- Health eating and wellness;
- *Workation*, a combination of work and vacation cruise, will attract more passengers, taking into consideration the higher percentage of remote working employers;
- New gaming facilities, entertainment areas upgraded with high tech facilities, gaming attractions, more onboard activities;
- Small ships and shorter cruises are more likely to operate;
- Increase attractiveness of young travelers for cruising;
- Enhanced cleaning protocol, new health screenings and others.

¹ <https://cruising.org/-/media/eu-resources/pdfs/CLIA%202019-Cruise-Trends--Industry-Outlook>

² <https://www.cruisebooking.com/articles/cruise-tips-and-tricks/cruise-trends-2021>

Many of these changes have already begun influencing the cruising experience, others have just been implemented as companies are focusing on strategies to restart safe tourism onboard. Many initiatives are concentrated on improving the onboard experience and properly adapting to a different crowd, new requirements and necessities. This translates to approaching a new ships design, able to cater for all new trends.

At pace with the younger generation, initiatives are directed towards gaming facilities, more and more diverse activities onboard, social media presence, increase of high tech in every aspect of travel etc.

3. Initiatives of new class types ships

The cruise ships are used for leisure voyages, offering a complex experience, not only the itinerary, but also the onboard amenities, attractions and entertainment playing a more and more important role in choosing a specific cruise ship.

The rapid development and specialization process of the entire cruise industry has influenced the modern cruise ships in terms of design, materials, size and other onboard functionalities, as well as the facilities provided, as a response to a modern and sophisticated clientele. More than that, these changes have occurred, by taking into account major concerns about finding proper solution to cruise industry's impact on the marine environment and coastal communities.

The extent of cruising worldwide, to new destinations, exotic or secluded ones has determined companies to reconsider the cruise ship design and amenities, along size and structure, enlarging the existing class types, with different types of vessels and ships for cruise and excursion services in seas, oceans, rivers and lakes all around the world. Nowadays, the main ship class types are, as follows:

- **Mainstream Cruise Ship**³ - Known as floating resorts, the mainstream cruise ships are the most common and popularly type of cruise ships. With a capacity for 850-3,000 passengers, these vessels are equipped with various standard resort features, amenities and services, such as restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs and discos, shopping areas, theatres and cinemas, galleries and museums, libraries, casinos, gyms and spas, swimming pools and other sport facilities. Available for a wide range of customers, these cruise lines offer some of the most extensive programs for children and teens being the perfect choice for families⁴. Mainstream cruise ships can further be divided into two more different types of cruise ships⁵:

- ✓ *Contemporary cruise lines* - are represented by cruise ships with large vessels and with largest variety of onboard entertainment options. These cruises offer the widest range of cruise schedules and itineraries, very appealing for families, small groups looking for entertainment facilities and services, as well as couples and honeymooners.
- ✓ *Upscale Contemporary Cruise Lines* - these cruise ships are designed with all the amenities of the regular contemporary cruise lines but have also facilities for catering to upscale passengers.

³ <http://www.windrosenetwork.com/The-Cruise-Industry-Types-of-Cruise-Ships>

⁴ <https://www.fodors.com/cruises/cruise-lines-by-type>

⁵ <https://passportsymphony.com/different-types-of-cruise-ships/>

- **Mega Cruise Ship** – are the largest and most sophisticated ships able to accommodate more than 3,000 passengers. In terms of capacity and onboard services, the mega cruise ships are defined as a new class of cruise vessels, operating for more than 5,000 passengers, in some cases.

- **Ocean Cruise Ship** – designed for long ocean voyages and world cruises, the ocean cruise ships is characterized by a more solid design and a more resistant structure. These ships may not provide the same entertainment options as the contemporary cruisers, attracting adventure-seeking travelers, rather than families.

- **Luxury Cruise Ship** – these cruise vessels are defined as the most sophisticated ones, with luxurious amenities, high standard features and services provided for an exclusive clientele, available for longer itineraries and exotic destinations. There can be divided into three different types:

- ✓ *Premium cruise lines* - are represented by large ships, but not mega ships, offering voyages to exotic destinations, at higher prices. The size of the ship is an impediment on docking in the city center. These types of cruise lines are considered to be a great choice for luxury travelers, catering for passengers seeking luxurious accommodation, fine dining, and excellent activities and services. The majority of passengers are more mature and exigent in services, ship amenities and accommodation facilities required.
- ✓ *Ultra-premium cruise lines* – are much smaller than the previous ones, but providing similar facilities. They offer voyages with unique itineraries, to popular ports and to less-traveled destinations at an upscale price range, higher than the premium cruise lines. Due to their size, there are able to dock near the city, with the opportunity for passengers to easily reach the popular tourist attractions.
- ✓ *Ultra-Luxury Cruise Lines* - this cruise type is the high end of luxury travel, in terms of amenities and services provided, meeting customers' every expectation, being the most expensive type of cruise travel.

- **Small Cruise Ship** - are offering the basic amenities as the mainstream cruise ships, but the size is considerably different, the small cruise ships having a capacity up to a few hundred passengers. Motor or sail powered vessels, or medium-sized cruise ships are able to access less familiar destinations, smaller ports unreachable by large vessels, characterized by an intimate experience and cruises theme such as: ecotourism, culture or history cruises, sea sports, single cruises, senior cruises and others.

- **Intimate vessels** – this category refers to even smaller ships including all types of ships from river ships and mega-yachts to sailing and expeditions ships. They are providing a flexible offer, allowing passenger the opportunity to determine the itinerary in accordance with their needs.

- **Sailing Vessels and Yachts**⁶ - considered being part of a specialty line, these types of cruise ships include yachts, sail-assisted ships, and dual-purpose cargo ships. The cruise ships are catering for budget conscious travellers that are interested in an intimate experience. Their popularity is well known in Mediterranean countries such as Italy, Greece, and Turkey, more so, in this pandemic context that affected the entire industry.

⁶ <https://passportsymphony.com/different-types-of-cruise-ships/>

- **Adventure Cruise Ship** – The vessels are usually sail powered, with luxury amenities and tend to be small in order to reach remote destinations or inaccessible ones for large vessels. They are oriented towards a specific type of passengers offering adventure activities such kayaking, rafting, exploring remote fjords, or shore excursions that include mountain climbing etc.

- **Expedition Cruise Ship** – represented by small sized vessels, are able to get closer to out of reach destinations, less visited locations. Specialized companies are operating this particular type of ships, proving passengers an exclusive experience in remote destinations such as the Arctic and Antarctic regions or in the coastal areas of ecological and biosphere reserves, in oppose to the itinerary of the conventional cruises. The ship design and features are characterized by a proper level of comfort and services, including inflatable motor boats and, in some cases, additional services, such as helicopters for expedition trips and shore landings. Expedition cruise ships are appealing for tourists seeking educational experience, with a less importance on the entertainment facilities onboard.

- **River Cruise Ship** – Having a reduced capacity, with no more than a few hundred passengers, these vessels are specially designed for river cruises and inland waterways. There are a variety of amenities offered, from ultra-high-tech onboard features, to paddleboats ship trips in rivers such as Amazon, Nile, Rhine, Volga, Mississippi, and many more worldwide.⁷ This category can further be classified in the following subdivisions⁸: *U.S. River Cruise Lines, Contemporary River Cruise Lines, Upscale Contemporary River Cruise Lines, Premium River Cruise Lines and Luxury River Cruise Lines.*

- **Luxury Hotel Barges** – Especially designed for shallow in land waterways, they are more luxurious than the classic river cruise, attracting customers that want to enjoy small destinations, such as towns or villages along the itinerary. Offering a capacity from 5 to 24 passengers, they provide high quality services due to the high ration of staff per person. They are usually cruising on France and UK cannels, but also in other European countries such as Germany and Belgium, with little representation in the USA.

- **Specialty cruise lines**⁹ - different from other categories, the specialty cruise lines can refer to more adventure - like ships, with distinctive features, such as tall ship sailings or expedition cruises. The tall ships with white sails are providing idyllic scenery for passengers. Expedition vessels can be equipped for icebreaking or feature special sonar outfit to look out for whales, and usually require Zodiac boats assistance for long run locations. These vessels have a small capacity, up to 200 passengers and are attracting independent and adventurous travellers. A wide range of specialists can be found onboard in order to properly conduct the expedition, like photographers, wildlife biologists, anthropologists, and others.

Each type of cruise ship offers a specific experience, with large addressability, appealing to different tourists and their requirements. The design, amenities, size and

⁷ <http://www.windrosenetwork.com/The-Cruise-Industry-Types-of-Cruise-Ships>

⁸ <https://allthingscruise.com/cruise-line-types-figuring-out-what-the-different-categories-mean/>

⁹ <https://www.fodors.com/cruises/cruise-lines-by-type>

other characteristics are consistent with the more and more complex needs of potential clients, each cruise line having a unique personality. With some differences, cruise lines are generally structured into three basic categories: mainstream, premium, and luxury. Some of the most important features in choosing a specific cruise line can be presented as atmosphere, service, food quality, design, types of passenger, extra charges and costs¹⁰.

	Mainstream Lines	Premium lines	Luxury Lines
Atmosphere	Busy, buzzing and crowded	Full yet comfortable	Lots of personal space
Service	Fine but rarely personal	Prompt and efficient	Sollicitous and refined
Food Quality	Ample buffet-quality cuisine	Good restaurant food cooked to order	Fine dining by top chefs
Design	Loud and colorful	Refined and modern	Elegant and art-filled
Who's onboard	Everyone	Less price-sensitive travelers	The elite
Extra charges	All but the basics	Some drinks and dining	Just spas and excursions
Cost	Budget-friendly to moderate	A bit towards the expensive side	Extravagant prices

Figure 1: The personal passengers' preferences on different type of lines

Source: <https://www.fodors.com/cruises/cruise-lines-by-type>

4. New cruise ship design

Cruise companies are reinventing the image of their ships, by offering a new perspective of cruise travel in comfort and entertainment. Examples of new ship design trends can be presented, as such¹¹:

Smart cabins. Integration of high technology on ships is facilitating an enjoyable safe journey. Smart apps can provide a number of benefits for cabin users, from opening doors, adjusting lights, controlling temperature and others. Use of gadgets will improve the overall experience, taking into account the necessity of social distancing. Ocean Medallion¹² technology is the most representative example of this kind, giving the opportunity for contactless embarkation, keyless actions, touchless payments, order meals, book events etc.

Modern cabin design. Cruise ship designers are redefining the image from a nautical colorful look to a modern chic and comfortable hotel one, using more subtle neutral tones. An important feature is represented by the associating cabins with socialization, rather than only for sleeping, therefore including a larger living space with sofa beds, spacious terrace etc. New design is focusing on accentuating

¹⁰ <https://www.fodors.com/cruises/cruise-lines-by-type>

¹¹ <https://www.cruisecritic.co.uk/articles.cfm?ID=1447>

¹² <https://www.princesscruises.de/en/holiday-princess/ocean-medallion>

similarities with hotel based amenities, an important example being Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection ship, Evrima, with 149 modern suites¹³.

Family centered accommodations. Providing accommodation for families has proven to be a challenge for cruise lines, the new amenities and design are focused on space for larger groups, connecting cabins, shared lounge for family members, with numerous facilities to select from and others.

Two story suites. Increased spacing by using two-story suites design is another example of innovative initiative. More cruise lines are adopting this display, with a sleeping area upstairs, equipped with glass walls for a special view and a living area downstairs.

Extravagant suites offer a variety of private amenities, games related areas, recreational spaces etc. in a spacious frame. The main focus is placed on the diverse character of products and services provided, such as private cinemas, different sleeping areas for parents and children, access to private outdoor facilities, pools and others.

Single cabins. In accordance with the solo travel trend, many cruise lines have integrated a new version of cabins representing a compact replica of a classic accommodation, as well as a combination of features single cabins with shared lounge for socializing.

5. Conclusions

The cruising industry has faced important challenges over the last years, due to the pandemic context. Companies have struggled to reinvent the image of cruising by appealing to a variety of potential passengers, catering for all types of guests and their preferences. This has reflected in major changes of ships' amenities and features, design and services offered.

More and more, the cruise ships prove to be excellent alternative to the classic accommodation, embodying a diverse and sophisticated offer, segmented by age, preferences, financial situation etc. New class types have emerged, particular to the exigencies of the clientele, but also according to the new regulations onboard for safe travel, influenced by the Covid 19 pandemic.

Assisted by increasing technology, cruise ships have gone through important changes in design, aspects underlined by the necessity of travel requirements in term of health and safety.

¹³ <https://www.cruisemapper.com/ships/Ritz-Carlton-Evrima-2100>

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