



Kindred CRUISES

Indulge
common interests
on a themed
voyage

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BY ROBIN ROENKER



IN A CRUISE, YOU can literally see the world — all without the hassle of arranging lodging, entertainment or dining details. Add in a boat full of passengers who share your passion, and you may have just found the recipe for pure vacation bliss.

Do you love *Star Trek*? There's a cruise for that. Want to sail with other country music or Broadway fans? You can. In fact, there's a themed cruise to fit almost any interest — from concert-packed, music-themed voyages to relaxing, craft-centered sailings

that help hone participants' scrapbooking, cooking or knitting know-how.

Themed cruise devotees say the experience can be truly magical — if you're open to embracing it.

Luis Garcia and Leiza Michaels, of Boca Raton, Fla., have enjoyed their time aboard the Ultimate Disco Cruise so much, for example, they now run a Facebook fan community devoted to it.

"I love disco," Garcia says. "For five days on board, I don't check the news and I forget what's going on in the world. Surrounded by that music, it feels like you're truly back in the 1970s, a time of love, peace and amazing dancing."

Specializing in scrapbooking, stamping and other paper crafting cruises, **Cruise & Crop** offers roughly 20 itineraries to Alaska, the Caribbean, Hawaii, Europe and more each year — often with workshops led by scrapbooking industry icons.

Founded in 2006 by mother-daughter travel specialists and avid scrapbookers Gail Pastor and Cheri Thomas, the travel company has organized more than 200 trips to date that merge the best parts of cruising and crafting.

"One of the great things about working with Cheri to plan a vacation is that she is, herself, a paper crafter so she is very good at explaining exactly what the classes involve and what supplies are needed," says Ronnie Dornhoffer of Springdale,

Ark., a frequent Cruise & Crop customer and instructor who traveled with the group to Alaska aboard Royal Caribbean's Quantum of the Seas in August.

On Cruise & Crop cruises, attendees have access to all the regular amenities and excursions of the cruise itself, but days at sea and down time in the evenings are often filled by scrapbooking sessions or classes in the ship's public areas or conference rooms.

"For some of our cruisers, the cruise host or instructor is the big draw. For others, it's the itinerary and cruise ports that are the deciding factor," says Thomas. "Our clients love the freedom to be able to get on a ship and focus on their craft, while experiencing new places." >



Scrapbooking
CRUISES

Ultimate Disco CRUISES

Set to sail Feb. 25 through March 5 from Miami to Key West, Fla., and Cozumel, Mexico, aboard the Celebrity Summit ship, the next **Ultimate Disco Cruise** will feature live concerts by scheduled performers Kool & The Gang, Billy Ocean, Sister Sledge, Taylor Dayne, the Tavares, as well as many other disco-era stars.

“We present entertainment that reimagines the disco era morning, noon and night across the entire cruise ship,” says Alan Rubens, the Ultimate Disco Cruise’s executive producer.

“The energy on board is just crazy,” agrees Michaels, who is looking forward to attending again in 2023. “Everybody is in (disco) costume most of the time.”

Disco Cruise attendees are a devoted bunch, with roughly 50 percent returning year after year. Popular contests, like the hustle dance competition, let experienced disco dancing passengers show off their footwork. For those newer to disco, dance classes are provided on board. And everyone can take part in the array of costume parties meant to showcase guests’

inner 1970s personas, including the perennial favorite “Saturday Night Fever Night.”

In addition to nearly nonstop disco music and dancing, passengers say the chance to mingle with the cruise’s scheduled professional performers is often a highlight of the trip.

“I bumped into Evelyn “Champagne” King at a buffet on a previous Disco Cruise, and she was so sweet,” says Garcia. “We also spotted George McCrae sitting nearby, who had a big hit with *Rock Your Baby* in the 1970s.”



Knitting CRUISES

For solo travelers like Bambi Tracy of Columbia, Mo., themed cruises offer a built-in community of like-minded passengers, who’ve become dear friends after numerous repeated voyages together.

“The people I’ve met on the knitting cruises are so amazing,” says Tracy, who booked her 12th cruise this past summer with the **Craft Cruises** company

— a voyage on Holland America Line to Norway, Iceland and Scotland. “I may only see some of them when we’re together on the cruise, but we talk or text together weekly.”

Craft Cruises offers an array of knitting cruise

itineraries, from large-ship cruises to Hawaii, Antarctica, Alaska or Europe to more intimate European river cruises. In addition to specialized port excursions that explore all things yarn — whether visits to sheep farms to check out wool

production, shopping for hand-dyed yarns or opportunities to meet local, native knitters — Craft Cruises’ attendees also have the benefit of learning from some of the best knitters in the world while on board.

“We offer knitting classes with top-level designers, instructors and professionals who’ve dedicated their lives to knitting, designing and teaching,” says Craft Cruises founder Melissa Gower, an avid knitter. “And we always have plenty of spaces on board to gather so we can knit together and practice what is being taught in the classroom.” >



Grand Prix and Culinary CRUISES



If you have dreamed of seeing Formula 1 cars zip through the famously curved streets of Monaco, Windstar Cruises can deliver you there in style. The cruise line's popular annual seven-day **Rome & Grand Prix of Monaco** cruise, next scheduled to set sail from Barcelona on May 23, treats attendees to onboard Formula 1 expert speakers, seats at the Saturday Grand Prix time trials and the finals on Sunday, plus after-event access to the pits as well as a Grand Prix swag bag.

"People love it," says Betsy O'Rourke, chief commercial officer for Windstar Cruises. "We dock in Monaco on our flagship ship, Wind Surf, so guests can walk right off the ship and have the advantage of this VIP

service that gets them conveniently in and out of all the Grand Prix events they want to experience."

For foodies, Windstar also offers three **culinary-themed cruises** led by various James Beard Foundation chefs each year. For 2023, planned culinary itineraries include a seven-day cruise in the Caribbean in March and a nine-day cruise exploring various Japanese ports of call in September.

Cruise guests can interact with the celebrity guest chefs, whether through intimate wine and food pairing events, cooking demonstrations or Q&A panels.

"Plus, everyone onboard gets to enjoy the special signature menus the chef has created for the week," O'Rourke says. ■



FINDING YOUR FIT

Looking for additional themed cruise options? Many offer itineraries each year, but fill up fast — so watch for both 2023 and 2024 dates and make plans early. Here are several upcoming sailings:

- **Star Trek: The Cruise**
Join fellow *Star Trek* fans, performers and TV series cast members Feb. 24 to March 3. This cruise departs from Los Angeles and sails to three ports in the Mexican Riviera: Cabo San Lucas, Mazatlan and Puerto Vallarta.
- **High Seas Rally**
Get set for a motorcycle rally on the high seas for an all-inclusive Caribbean cruise Oct. 29 to Nov. 5 aboard Royal Caribbean's *Mariner*

- of the Seas. Departs from Cape Canaveral, Fla., with stops in Nassau, Bahamas; CocoCay, Bahamas; Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic; and Labadee, Haiti.
- **The Broadway Cruise**
Join some of Broadway's biggest stars March 31 to April 5 for stellar performances and fun aboard a round-trip cruise from New York City to Bermuda on Norwegian Cruise Line's Norwegian Gem.

- **Golden Fans at Sea**
Bring your pals and your confidants on this *Golden Girls* fan cruise April 5-13 aboard the *Celebrity Summit*. Departs from Miami with port stops in Key West, Fla., and Cozumel, Mexico.
- **'70s Rock & Romance Cruise**
Cruisers who adore this iconic era can enjoy performances, panel discussions, pool parties and more March 16-23. Departs from Miami

- with stops in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic; San Juan, Puerto Rico; and St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands.
- **Aventura Latin Dance Cruise**
Passengers will don their dancing shoes to salsa, merengue and tango the days and nights away Feb. 3-7 aboard *Royal Caribbean Cruises' Jewel of the Seas*. Departs from Port Canaveral, Fla., and stops in Labadee, Haiti.