

CLIA Releases 2008 Cruise Market Profile Study

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Findings Demonstrate Growing Cruise Industry Driven By Satisfied Customers, with Travel Agents Playing Essential Role

Driven by satisfied customers eager to travel more, despite the uncertain economy, the cruise industry is well-positioned for continued growth and success. This is one of the conclusions to be drawn from the Cruise Lines International Association's (CLIA) 2008 Cruise Market Profile Study released today.

The biannual survey of American consumers, first conducted in 1986, identifies American consumer demographics, attitudes and intentions as they relate to leisure travel and specifically to cruising. Research was conducted online in March and April 2008 by TNS, a leading market research firm. A total of 2,426 U.S. residents were interviewed.

This year's findings reinforce previous studies in painting a picture of a healthy, in-demand cruise industry fueled by vacationers with broader travel interests than non-cruisers and whose satisfaction with cruising is based on perceived and realized value. In 2007, 9.57 million Americans took a cruise vacation representing 76 percent of the total 12.56 million guests carried on CLIA member cruise lines. Based on this year's study, 33.7 million Americans stated intent to cruise within the next three years.

The study also shows that travel agents, who sell the great majority of cruises, remain a vital part of the industry and are perceived by travelers as providing the best service in vacation and cruise planning. The majority of cruisers (70 percent) reported that professional designations, such as CLIA's Cruise Counsellor Certification, would influence their choice in selecting a travel agent to plan and book their vacation. "Given the current economic climate, we are particularly pleased to see that American cruisers remain bullish on the industry. Their high satisfaction with a wonderfully diverse cruise product drives their intention to take more cruises. In fact, cruisers represent the ideal travel prospect, because of their broad interest in all types of travel and willingness to spend on what they perceive to be high value experiences," said Terry Dale, CLIA's president and CEO.

"This fact is not lost on CLIA's nearly 16,000 travel agency members who continue to be the industry's invaluable distribution system and consumers' most reliable source of assistance and service in planning and booking vacations," he continued.

Among the key findings of CLIA's 2008 Cruise Market Profile Study:

Consumer interest in cruising continues to be strong despite downward pressure on travel in general due to the economy and fuel costs, 77 percent of past cruise vacationers and 55 percent of vacationers who have yet to take a cruise expressed interest in doing so within the next three years.

CLIA survey respondents who indicated a "definite" or "probable" intent to cruise within the next three years represents almost 34 million adults from the target market (at least 25 years of age with a minimum household income of \$40,000), which is good news for not only the cruise industry, but also for travel agents who can cultivate new customers.

94.8 percent of all cruisers rate their cruise experience as satisfying with 44 percent claiming the highest "Extremely Satisfying" ranking making a cruise among the very best in meeting and exceeding guest expectations.

The general profile of the 2008 cruise vacationer is upscale (with a median household income of \$93,000), educated (69 percent have a college degree) and the median age of cruisers is now 46 years old, down from 49 in 2006, which shows that cruise vacations continue to appeal to younger travelers.

Travelers most frequently name the Caribbean as their cruise destination of choice (43 percent) with Alaska, Bahamas, Hawaii, Europe and the Mediterranean/Greek islands also top choices.

Cruise vacationers agree (80 percent) that a cruise is a great way to sample destinations that they may wish to visit on a future land-based vacation.

The cruise line utilization and the consumer awareness of more than 30 domestic embarkation ports adds strong inducement to future cruising: 72 percent cite additional "close to home" ports as increasing their likelihood to cruise. Respondents cited the convenience of being able to drive to the ship (71 percent), saving money by not having to purchase air travel (67 percent) and avoiding the hassles of flying to embarkation points (64 percent) as primary benefits of "close to home" cruising options.

Cruise vacationers are the premier leisure traveler. Cruisers travel 39 percent more per year than non-cruise vacationers, they take 2.9 annual leisure trips on all types of vacations by both land and sea (21 percent or nearly one in four of their vacations are by cruise), and they typically spend 50 percent more on their vacation travel than a non-cruise vacationer.

Both past cruisers (69 percent) and cruise prospects (56 percent) recognize a cruise vacation as providing very high value for the vacation dollar. Those who have experienced the inclusive nature and service of a cruise vacation rank cruising as the best vacation value.

Typical vacationers, including cruisers (75 percent), travel in pairs, usually with spouses, with the proportion of family travel with kids under 18 steadily growing (25 percent in 2008 from 13 percent in 2002).

Travelers, including cruisers, consider destination as the most influential aspect of choosing a vacation.

Travel agents continue to play an important role in planning and booking cruises and travel: 42 percent of respondents say agents provide the best service, up from 40 percent in 2006, 59 percent are extremely or very satisfied with agents, with overall satisfaction of 93 percent, 78 percent of cruisers use travel agents for all types of travel planning as compared to 44 percent of non-cruise vacationers.

A Podcast with Terry Dale, president and CEO, discussing CLIA's 2008 Cruise Market Profile Study, can be downloaded at:

http://msilver-pr.com/terry_dale_interview.mp3

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