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25
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Planes, Trains and ... Cruise Ships?

by: [Arden Jobling-Hey](#) in: [Editor's Desk](#)

Cruise ships and the environment. An industry on the brink of sinking, for good.

Travel with purpose is all about utilizing opportunities to grow in every capacity as you explore the world around you. One great way to travel the world while earning your keep is to piggy back on something that already does, like a plane, train or ... the almighty cruise ship!

There are various ways to land yourself a job at sea, while cruising the world one port of call at a time and earning some pretty good money while you do it. This being said, before you jump aboard, it is important to look at the impact that these opportunities have on the environment around us. In keeping up with current events taking place the world over, namely the recent capsizing of the Costa Concordia cruise ship off the western coast of Italy, this week's blog is dedicated to taking a closer (but brief) look at the cruise industry and the impact ships can have on their surroundings, in good times, and in bad.

Who is Responsible?

Like bandits on the run, cruise ships are constantly on the move, making it hard to tie them down and even harder to make them comply with one set of rules or regulations. For that reason, associations like the European Cruise Council, and Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), exist in order to provide members with suggested guidelines regarding various components of cruise line operations. The [CLIA](#) has, accessible via their website, provided guidelines on: Accessibility; Environment; Financial Responsibility; Gambling; Public Health and Medical Capabilities; Oversight; Passenger Service Act; Safety and Security; and Shipboard Workplace Code of Conduct.

The inherit problem here is that while the CLIA provides the guidelines, they are not an enforcer. For example, the CLIA section on "Shipboard workplace Code of Conduct" reveals that the code of conduct is actually regulated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Labor Organization (ILO), a member based organization that provides supervisory duties at best. Consequently, the responsibility of monitoring which standards are successfully being met by cruise lines can be heavily dependent on what action they are taking, in whose waters, when.

Environmental Impacts

Waste, pollution and H2O: According to planeta.com, despite the fact that most ships are registered to countries that are signatory to international environmental protocols (for waste, treatment, storage and disposal) there is evidence that cruise ship waste is reaching the shore of many Caribbean islands. How much waste you ask? Planeta.com suggests that a single cruise ship produces 1 kg burnable waste, 5 kg food waste and 1 kg glass and tin waste per person, per day. That is a lot of waste – so, where does it go?

The dumping of waste is controlled by the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping Wastes and other Matter, which allows the following materials to be disposed at by way of dumping:

1. Dredged material
2. Sewage sludge
3. Fish waste, or material resulting from industrial fish processing operations
4. Vessels and platforms or other man-made structures at sea
5. Inert, inorganic geological material
6. Organic material of natural origin
7. Bulky items primarily comprising iron, steel, concrete and similar unharmed materials for which the concern is physical impact and limited to those circumstances, where such wastes are generated at locations, such as small islands with isolated communities, having no practicable access to disposal options other than dumping.
8. CO2 streams from CO2 capture processes.(added under amendments adopted in 2006, which entered into force in 2007).

For more information from the International Maritime Organization, [click here](#).

The list is relatively short which is a good thing, but as the convention does not ban the dumping of all waste, there are still tons of waste, including human waste, food waste etc. being launched into the ocean. The result can be detrimental. The pollution level caused by cruise ships can lead to the loss of marine life and the degradation of the reef structure as has been the case in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica. In addition to environmental concerns, these countries are also now susceptible to water disease that can be attributed to polluted water sources.

Carbon Emissions: Another thing to be aware of before setting sail aboard a cruise ship, is the amount of carbon emissions released into our atmosphere but these oversized tugboats. Did you know, according to an article in the Telegraph, that cruise ships emit three times more carbon emissions than aircraft? Carnival cruise lines, reported using an on average release of 712 kg of CO2 per kilometre. The ships carry, on average 1,776 passengers and it is estimated that 401g of CO2 is emitted per passenger per kilometre. This means that the emissions are 36 times greater than the carbon footprint of a Eurostar passenger and at least 3 times greater than a passenger on board a Boeing 747 or passenger ferry. Enough said.

Fuel: We all know that the risk of a fuel leak from anything occupying water space cannot be good. Taking a look at headline news, we can see the potential impact cruise ships can have on the environment, especially when things go wrong. Off the coast of Western Italy, near the Giglio Island, the 290 metre long Costa Concordia cruise ship is currently lying untouched. Should it slip, and sink 70 metres below, it could rupture a fuel tank, leaking 2,200 metric tonnes of heavy fuel and causing heavy damage to marine life in the area and the natural maritime park around

Giglio island. The risk of cruise ships springing a leak, may however, not be likely, but it's there. What is more relevant is the everyday impact the extraordinary amounts of fuel used by cruise ships have on a daily basis. Cruiselawnews.com suggests that one of the problems with the cruise industry is the use of diesel and bunker fuels which, they suggest, spew toxic particular matter into the air. Consequently, some ports of call, like California, have required cruise ships use cleaner fuel as they begin their approach into port. The website suggests that the vessels approaching California emit toxic diesel particular matter that equivalent to 150,000 big trucks driving 125 miles daily.

Sinking Standards and Unsustainable Tourism

The negative impact of the cruise industry has a reach far beyond environmental degradation. It can also be seen through the impact it has on the lives of people who depend on the money generated through cruise lines to sustain their livelihood. These can be employees of the ship or entrepreneurs on-land at ports of call that have become increasingly dependent on passers through to keep money rolling in.

Labour Laws: According to cruiseshipjob.net, an eager undergrad or graduate student can make \$2600-3000/month as an assistant Bar Manager, or \$2000-2800/month organizing daily activities for guests on board a Cruise Ship. Looking good? While certain employees may be eligible for well paid jobs that allow them to work normal hours while cruising along, labour policies on-deck vary greatly, depending on who is doing the hiring, and who exactly, is getting hired. According to the BBC Press Office, in an interview with with crew members and passengers of the CLIA, labour standards are frequently not met. Cruise lines adhere to flag state regulations and/or applicable collective bargaining agreements, meaning that there is a lot of wiggle room when it comes to ship specific rules and regulations, if they don't get caught. The same article suggests that cruise companies register their vessels in countries with accommodating attitudes to labour laws such as Panama and the Bahamas where legal redress for crews and passengers is often too costly and/or complicated to pursue. It is suggested that some crew members, many of whom come from third world countries, work up to 18-hour days while their time sheets are falsified to reflect a standard eight-hour work day.

Fluctuating Economies: One of the acclaimed advantages to cruise lines is the positive impact on local economies as ships roll into varying ports of call. It seems simple enough. Huge ships pull into a port where thousands of people filter down the gangway into the village to buy lots of food and souvenirs. In fact, the money generated is so high, that the CLIA claims that the U.S economy benefitted by \$37.9 billion in 2010, \$18.0 billion of that a direct result of purchases by the cruise line and passengers.

Unfortunately, the partnership between cruise lines and ports of call is one that hugely favours the cruise line and remains incredibly unpredictable with the possibility of leaving small economies worse for wear when the big ships, don't show up. According to the Lighthouse Foundation for the seas and oceans, the market is extremely volatile. The foundation points to the political instability, and rise in fuel prices, that resulted in the loss of over \$100,000 for small businesses in various ports of call throughout the pacific in 1974. Today, a number of Caribbean islands receive more tourists from cruise ships than from stopover tourists who bring much more in terms of economic gain to the islanders, making the market increasingly instable and instigating a fearsome trend within the industry.

The Good News?

While it may seem as if cruising is nothing but bad news no matter what way you spin it, there are some developments that could (odds are not good) lead one to catch a flicker of light at the end of the tunnel. The latest [cruise ship report card](#) from Friends of the Earth (environmental group) shows Disney cruise line as having improved from an F to a C-. The report, which tracks the Sewage Treatment, Air Pollution Reduction, and Water Quality Compliance, is disappointing at best. None of the cruise lines scored an A in 2010, while Crystal Cruises scored an F, and both Royal Caribbean International and Celebrity Cruises scored a D+.

While cruise lines continue to shock and awe with their disregard for environment impact, an article from Frommers does suggest that cruise lines have been, over the past decade, experimenting with various environmental technologies and initiatives such as advanced wastewater treatment, alternative energy generation, new and more efficient hull forms, engines, air conditioning, lighting and so on. An interview with a representative from Royal Caribbean taken from the Telegraphy also points to slow advancements in favour of the environment. According to the spokesman, the cruise line burns bio-diesel fuel when available and had recently installed advanced water purification systems on board all ships, costing more than 50 million GBP, and smokeless gas-turbine engines.

The bottom line? It's up to you whether or not you want to cruise, as long as you are aware of the potential consequence and impact it will have on the environment. If you are still eager to cruise your way around the world, check out these links and discover some ocean-friendly cruise lines that allow you to lessen your footprint, while taking to the high seas:

["7 Ocean-Friendly Eco Crises Hitting the High Seas"](#)

[The world's most energy efficient cruise ship?](#)

[Top 5 Eco-Friendly Cruise Lines](#)



ARDEN JOBLING-HEY

outreach, events

Originally from Toronto, Arden has studied, volunteered and worked her way around the world. From promoting HIV/AIDS awareness as an international volunteer in Tanzania and teaching business English in Germany, to exploring hidden treasures of the Turkish bazaar and accepting a fairy tale proposal amidst the dunes of the Moroccan dessert. Arden believes that as long as there are unknown lands to discover, the adventure never ends! She holds an M.A in International Communications and Development from City University London in the UK and has worked as a freelance writer and a development practitioner for a number of NGOs.

[back to top](#)

