

Cruise Ship Blues—A Review



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Cruise Ship Blues:
The Underside of the Cruise Industry
by Ross A. Klein

Overview

Cruising is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. Attracting more than 12 million passengers a year, cruise ships themselves have swollen dramatically in size, now sometimes carrying as many as 5,000 people on board. Today's cruise industry is neither environmentally nor socially sustainable. Not surprisingly, this growth is causing huge problems—problems that the industry would rather not acknowledge, and the potential cruiser would have a hard time discovering.

Tax avoidance, false advertising, shady business practices, sexual harassment, risks to health and safety, rape, and environmental destruction. The list seems to include every known abuse created by society. *Cruise Ship Blues* describes the many abuses wrought by one industry—the cruise industry—on its customers and on our oceans. Author Ross Klein begins with an overview of the industry:

- Currently, four cruise companies—sailing under a number of “brand names”—control almost 90 percent of all berths on cruise ships. The four players, in order of size, are: Carnival (Carnival Cruise, Holland America, Costa, Windstar, Seabourn, Cunard); Royal Caribbean Cruises (Royal Caribbean International, Celebrity); P&O Princess (P&O, Princess, Swan Hellenic, Aida, Seetours, P&O Cruises Australia); and Malaysia-based Star Cruises (Norwegian Cruise Lines, Star Cruises, Orient Line). Soon, three companies will control 90 percent of the berths if the merger between Carnival and P&O Princess is finalized later this spring.
- More than 60 percent of cruise ships are registered in the Bahamas, Panama, or Liberia, even though they are headquartered in the United States and owned by American interests.
- By flying “flags of convenience” and registering in other countries, cruise lines are able to avoid many U.S. labor and environmental laws. As “foreign” corporations (albeit with primarily

American passengers), they also avoid virtually all U.S. taxes.

Cruise Ship Blues also examines:

- *The Myth of the All-Inclusive Vacation.* Cruise ships make their profit from casinos, beverage sales and art auctions—things not covered by the package price.
- *Ship Safety.* Between 1980 and 1992 the U.S. Coast Guard investigated 73 accidents involving large cruise ships, including 13 collisions; 16 fires, 22 equipment or material failures; and 22 groundings. Between 1994 and 1998, Carnival Cruise Lines received 108 complaints of sexual assault. Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines reported 58 sexual assaults over the same period. During the 1998 season more than 2,100 cases of flu were reported among passengers and crew on Alaska cruises.¹
- *The State of On-board Ship Environmental Affairs.* In a one-week trip, a typical cruise ship generates about 210,000 gallons of sewage. During peak summer season, with an average of 20 ships each carrying 2,000 passengers, the daily discharge of sewage in the Inside Passage is approximately 2.5 million gallons per day, equivalent to the entire amount of sewage discharged in Alaska's capital, Juneau. The Inside Passage is a thousand miles of protected waterway, shouldered by protective island chains and the coasts of Washington, British Columbia and Alaska, abounding with wildlife and beauty.
- *Cruise Ship Slave Labor.* The average crew member on a cruise ship works ten straight months without a vacation or a day off. Dining room staff and room stewards typically work more than 80 hours a week. A janitor, employed by Carnival Cruise Lines for five years works 70 hours a week and earns \$372 a month—a wage that works out to be less than \$1.55 an hour.

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Oceana is a non-profit international advocacy organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the world's oceans through policy advocacy, science, law and public education. Founded in 2001, Oceana's constituency includes members and activists from more than 190 countries and territories who are committed to saving the world's marine environment. In 2002, American Oceans Campaign became part of Oceana's international effort to protect ocean ecosystems and sustain the circle of life. Oceana, headquartered in Washington, D.C., has additional offices in key U.S. coastal areas and will open offices in Latin America and Europe in 2003.

¹ More recently, in 2002, nearly 3,000 passengers were stricken with the Norwalk-like virus. A summary of passenger health problems is available on Oceana's Public Health fact sheet and at www.cruisejunkie.com.



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