

INTRODUCTION

I am sitting on my balcony aboard the *Sapphire Princess* as I type this. The wake of the ship spreads out behind us like a jewel-encrusted bridal train, and I can feel the spray of the Pacific Ocean on my face. Ah, this is the life! After dozens of cruises, my heart still quickens every time I see the smokestack of a ship and catch my first glimpse of her sitting at the pier, waiting for the passengers to board.

I've been in the cruise industry for more than 28 years, first working for Princess Cruises in the corporate offices, and then working on board the *Pacific Princess* for a year in the Mediterranean. After my time at Princess, friends and family would still call me for information on cruises, so I eventually started selling them as a travel agent, and after my divorce, opened my own agency, Kensington Cruises. I joined host agency, Montrose Travel, in 2006 and had the opportunity to meet many new travel agents eager to learn about the business and travel. Once these new agents heard about my experience, they would inundate my in-box with questions about cruising, cruise lines, selling cruises, and every other kind of question you could imagine. Finally, one of these agents, Julia Pfeiffer, encouraged me to write this book so I could put all of this knowledge to good use and help those just beginning in the business.

If you are reading this, chances are you are beginning your adventure in the travel industry. Whether you are jumping in with both feet and making this your full time career, or just doing this as a part-time diversion, I hope the information contained in this book will start you off in the right direction selling cruises. In these pages I will offer practical tips on how to organize your office and paperwork, how to read deck plans, information on the different cruise lines, and how to make the most money for your time.

So, if you are ready, let's get started selling cruises!

Why Cruises?

The travel industry has taken several huge blows in the last twenty years. In the “old days,” travel agents used to make the bulk of their money selling air tickets and putting together tours. In 1978, the airlines decided to stop paying commissions to travel agents, and decimated the income potential for most brick-and-mortar agencies. (A *brick-and-mortar agency* is another name for a travel agency that has a store front in a commercial location, as opposed to a home-based agency.)

Over the years, I have dabbled in selling all kinds of travel, including tours, airline tickets, hotels, and cruises. My experience is that, as a travel agent, I *personally* make more money for my time selling cruises. That’s not to say that the travel agent down the street is making a wonderful living selling corporate travel, or the local travel agency downtown is doing very well, thank you very much, selling any kind of travel their clients are looking for – for me, personally, however, cruises have been the most profitable. Why? I have become an expert in my field. I specialize in this form of travel, so that when it comes time to match my client with a cruise, I don’t have to spend valuable research time trying to figure it out for them; I instinctively know how best to fit them to their ideal cruise vacation.

I can’t tell you how many times I have spent hours and hours researching various elements of a trip to Europe, including air, train, hotels, sightseeing, etc., when for less than half that amount of time, I could have booked them on a beautiful cruise and received twice the commission! Plus, with a cruise, I know they are going to get a wonderful experience *if I’ve matched them well with the right cruise line and itinerary*.

The cruise lines want their passengers to use travel agents. Yes, the cruise lines have opened up telephone lines for passengers to book directly with them, but most of them will allow a travel agent to take over the booking if the passenger gives the travel agent permission to do so. Why? There is a lot of peripheral work that the travel agent does to make sure the passenger’s cruise vacation goes smoothly, and the cruise lines know this. They don’t want to deal with all the little questions your clients are going to have prior to their cruise; that’s why they pay you, the travel agent, a commission, so you can handle that for them. In the late 1990s, Renaissance Cruise Lines tried to bypass the travel agents and encouraged passengers to book directly with the cruise line. They very soon learned the error of their ways (Renaissance folded soon after the September 11th events), and when Frank del Rio and Joe Watters started Oceania Cruise Lines, they made it a point to apologize to the travel agent community and woo travel agents back.

You are the lifeline between potential passengers and the various cruise lines out there. They want your business, so they have put into place wonderful training courses for you to learn how to sell their products. We will discuss these later in the book. I encourage you to take advantage of these online training opportunities as well as CLIA's (Cruise Line International Association) trainings; they are an invaluable way to learn the business of selling cruises, and will complement what you will learn here. More on that later....

HOW CRUISES WORK

Most people don't realize that ships cruise seven days a week. On "turnaround day," a ship arrives into port usually by 7 a.m. and disembarks all the previous cruises' passengers. The staff cleans like crazy to get all the staterooms and public rooms ready to go for the next cruise, and then by noon or 1 p.m., embarks all the new passengers in order to sail by 5 or 6 p.m.!

Occasionally a ship will arrive into a port and have an overnight; Venice, Italy is a common turnaround port where cruise lines will have an in-port overnight so their guests can use the ship as a hotel. While this is great for the passengers, the staff still needs to have the ship ready in a matter of hours, because there are no days in between where there are no passengers onboard. This means the room stewards, dining room staff, buffet staff, officers, and all other essential shipboard staff never receives a full day off. They typically have three, six, or nine-month contracts, and work seven days a week! They are the hardest working people I have ever met and most work *for tips only*! Can you imagine working 14 hours a day, 7 days a week, and knowing that your pay is dependent on whether or not the people you are serving like you, and are willing to give you \$3 a day, per person, for all your hard work? I say, God bless them! I always make sure to let them know how much I appreciate them, and usually pre-tip my room stewards and dining room staff (if I will have the same team throughout the cruise), in addition to what is "required" by the cruise line.