

The New York Times

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit www.nytreprints.com for samples and additional information. Order a reprint of this article now.

PRINTER FRIENDLY FORMAT
SPONSORED BY



February 15, 2009

CRUISE ISSUE | THE GREEN TRAVELER

Cruise Lines Urged to Shrink Their Footprints

By JENNIFER CONLIN

MOVING gently through pristine blue waters, floating past whales and glaciers, fjords and islands, it is easy to see why travelers might think a vacation on a cruise ship is more eco-friendly than jetting through the earth's atmosphere on a plane.

Not so, according to Climate Care, a United Kingdom-based carbon-offsetting company, whose statistics show that cruise ships emit nearly twice as much carbon dioxide as airplanes. "We now know they are far more polluting per passenger kilometer than planes," said Justin Francis, co-founder of Responsibletravel.com, a directory of environmentally friendly vacations that partners with Climate Care. "Add to that the fact that many passengers fly to the port of departure before boarding," he said, "and you have a double carbon whammy."

According to environmentalists, carbon dioxide emissions are just a drop in the ocean when it comes to eco problems on luxury liners. Most ships run on so-called bunker fuel, the cheapest and dirtiest fuel oil, which not only powers the vessel, but also all the amenities on board: restaurants, swimming pools and nightclubs among them. Royal Caribbean will launch its largest ship yet this year, the Oasis of the Seas with a capacity of 5,400 passengers, and its amenities will include a microclimate-controlled Central Park, with irrigation and drainage systems, as well as trees that will tower more than two and a half decks high.

Then there is the issue of waste. A one-week voyage on a large ship is estimated to produce 210,000 gallons of sewage, a million gallons of gray water (runoff from sinks, baths, showers, laundry and galleys), 25,000 gallons of oily bilge water, 11,550 gallons of sewage sludge and more than 130 gallons of hazardous wastes, according to figures supplied by the environmental group Friends of the Earth.

Marcie Keever, director of the Clean Vessels Campaign of Friends of the Earth, said, "These are floating cities that go back and forth through our waters, dumping toxins from their enormous amount of waste." She added that cruise ships also pollute the coast lines (affecting marine life, beaches and coral reefs), as well as the air (sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions from their massive engines). Or as Mr. Francis bluntly put it, "The cruise line industry's record on environmental pollution is generally very poor."

Still, some positive environmental news is beginning to emerge from these murky waters. Thanks to increased pressure from the Environmental Protection Agency, as well as various environmental campaign groups, stricter state and federal regulations are being passed. As of this year, all ships have to burn low-sulfur diesel fuel instead of the cheaper bunker fuel within 24 nautical miles of California's coast, and there is proposed legislation to prohibit the discharge of raw sewage, gray water and oily bilge water within 12 miles of United States shores. What's more, a recent E.P.A. report assessing cruise ship discharges in Alaska (where standards are the most stringent), revealed that 60 percent of the ships tested were discharging concentrations of bacteria, chlorine, nutrients, metals and other pollutants — a finding that may move the industry to invest even more heavily in the latest advanced waste-water treatment systems, particularly as the ships that passed the test all had that technology.

"It is definitely possible for them to clean up their act," said Ms. Keever of Friends of the Earth. "And now that they know about it from the E.P.A. report, they should do something about it. They certainly have the ability to pay for it."

Cruising continues to be one of the fastest-growing areas of tourism, according to the Cruise Line International Association, an industry group that represents 95 percent of the worldwide market, and includes 23 cruise lines that total 200 ships. Terry Dale, chief executive officer of the association, said, "Even in these tough economic times, we are forecasting that in 2009 a record 13.5 million people will take a cruise," adding that last year the industry was worth \$38 billion, employing roughly 350,000 United States workers. "As a leader in travel we feel we have to be industry stewards of the environment," he said. "We are not sitting back, but rather trying hard to be proactive and meet the challenges."

To that end, the cruise industry is now pioneering various new green technologies. Princess Cruises uses "cold ironing" — plugging ships into electrical power at ports — in San Francisco; Juneau, Alaska; and Seattle. Norwegian Cruise Line introduced a recycling program in 2007, in which some 15,000 gallons of used cooking oil were offloaded and then converted into useable biodiesel for farming equipment in Florida. Disney Cruise Lines sponsors volunteer coastal cleanups to remove garbage and debris from shorelines. Holland America has started a Ship to Shore program in which reusable goods (linens, individually sized toiletries, dishes, mattresses) are donated to charities, as well as an Avoiding Whale Strikes program in which crews learn to assist in the recovery and ensure the safety of all whale species.

"ALL our members have to have environmental policies and practices in place," Mr. Dale said, citing the on-board recycling programs of the association's ships, and investment in LED lighting, solar panels and high efficiency appliances. In addition, many cruise companies, including Carnival Corporation, have an environmental officer aboard all ships to monitor compliance.

"We even have eco hangers on one line," he added, mentioning a program introduced last year on Crystal Cruises in which guests are encouraged to take home the recyclable hangers provided on board, to, as a press statement says, "remind them both of the importance of conservationism and Crystal Cruises' stewardship of the environment."

Also on the rise are new technologies for smaller vessels. Ecoventura, a family-owned company in Ecuador that offers cruises in the Galapagos, recently unveiled one of the first hybrid-energy motor yachts. Sponsored by Toyota, a supporter of the World Wildlife Fund, the yacht, which sleeps 20, has 40 solar panels and two wind turbines on the upper deck, which should provide enough power to support roughly 17 percent of the energy formerly produced by two carbon fuel-based generators.

"We know when it comes to vacations, cruising is the best deal financially for many people," said Ms. Keever, of Friends of the Earth. "We just think travelers should try to choose one that is trying hard to do better environmentally."

Copyright 2009 The New York Times Company

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)