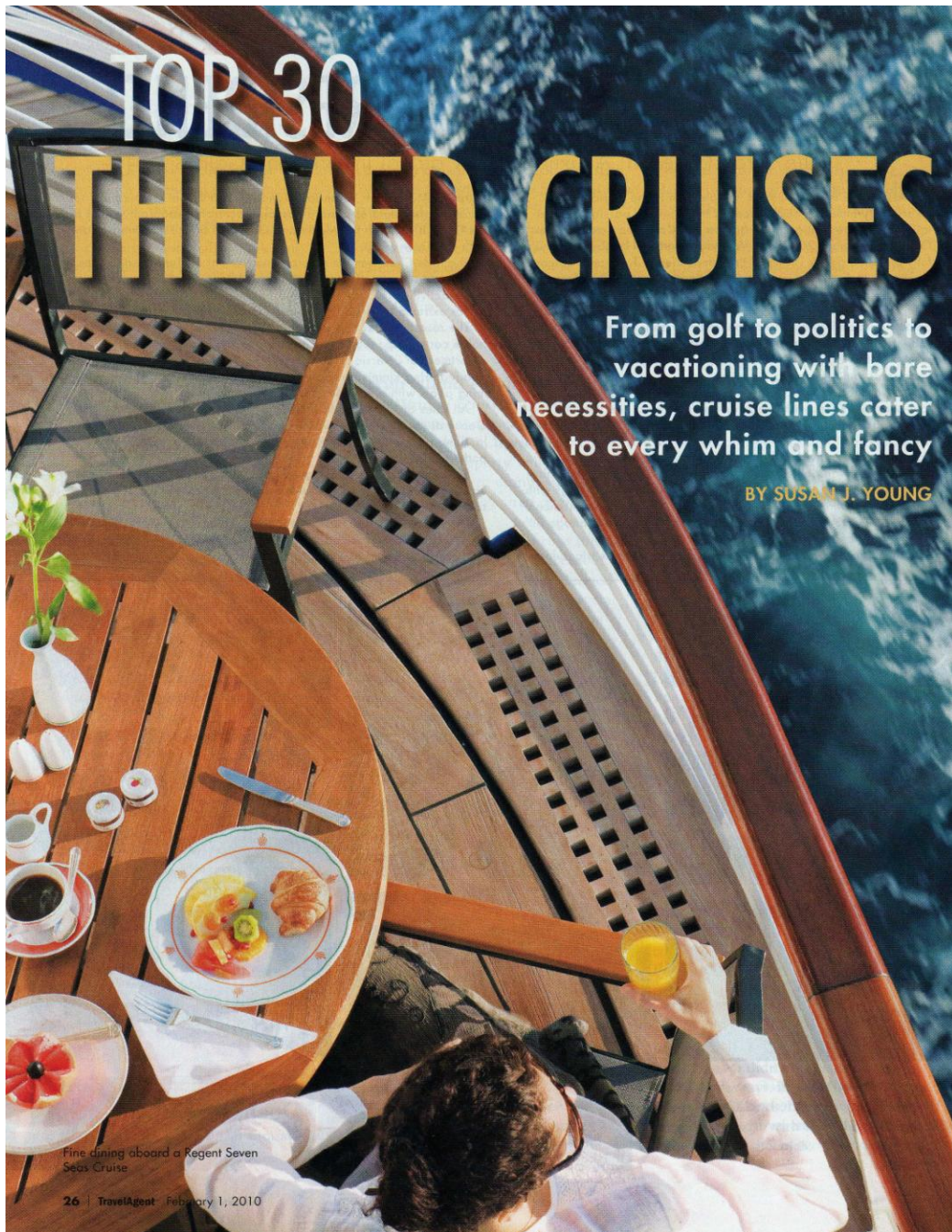


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AMERICA'S
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TAPPING INTO themed cruises that precisely match your client's interest, hobby or passion is equivalent to adding a "must-have" ingredient to your recipe for sales success.

Themed cruises often include private onboard events or activities not open to regular cruise guests. So, "the cruise isn't sold based on price, it's sold on a specific experience," stresses Susan Schaefer, independent affiliate of America's Vacation Center (www.americasvacationcenter.com), Brentwood, TN. "Your client isn't looking for the lowest price, so you aren't competing with pricing when selling a themed cruise."

Themed cruises, which may carry an added fee beyond the cruise fare, range from cruise-line offerings to affinity group cruises and full-ship charters. Targeted activities entice first-timers and satisfy repeaters. "As the cruising public gets more and more accustomed to cruises, they need a little more stimulus to get back on the ship," notes Jane Allen, franchise owner, Cruise Holidays (www.cruiseholidays.com), Thousand Oaks, CA.

Pay-wise, many themed cruises are commissionable or offer referral fees. Others aren't commissionable as they are exclusive to the agency that designed them. So why not create your own themed cruise? It can be lucrative. "We have several franchise owners and independent agents that have recurring theme cruises, some [of] which have led to full ship charters," says Steven Hattem, vice president of marketing, CruiseOne (www.cruiseone.com) and Cruises Inc. (www.cruisesinc.com)

Travel Agent talked with travel professionals about which themed cruises are trendy and selling well. Here's our countdown of the "Top 30 Themed Cruises for 2010."

Clients who love roaring engines may book **Motorcycle Cruises (#30)**. ETA Motorcycle Cruises (www.cruise-eta.com/motorcyclecruise.htm) sail on multiple dates from Port Everglades, FL, and Bayonne, NJ. "We, as a travel agency, can secure 30 motorcycle spots on a specific cruise date, and we do pay a finder's fee, depending on the cruise date and availability," says Steve Wallach, ETA's president. Reservations must be made through ETA. Bikers bring their own machines and ride off from a reserved gangway in ports.

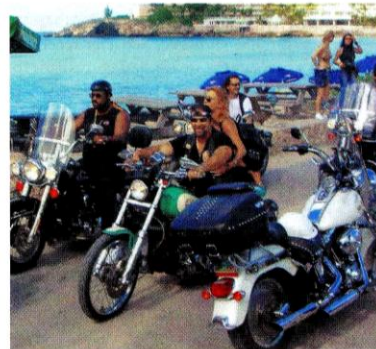
Clients may relish mingling with famous novelists on **Book Cruises (#29)**. Multiple writers may sail, or one author might constitute a "mini-themed cruise" within a regular cruise. Pat Conroy, author of *South of Broad*, will sail on the April 17 Rome-to-London segment of **Crystal Cruises' (#28)** World Cruise.

Malaka Hilton, owner, **Admiral Travel International** (www.admiraltravel.com), Sarasota, FL, says **Film Cruises (#28)** also have potential. Partnering with a regional film organization, her agency previously chartered a **Seabourn Cruise Line** (www.seabourn.com) ship during the Cannes Film Festival. "We created events and activities onboard as well as onshore that rounded out the guests' experience of the festival, and it was a great success," says Hilton.

Medical Condition Cruises (#27) are on the rise—letting families relax and

vacation with others who understand their special needs. A few lines have special needs facilities, including **Holland America's** (www.hollandamerica.com) *Westerdam* with a dialysis room. Alumni Cruises operates **Autism Cruises** (www.autismontheseas.com) on **Celebrity Cruises and Royal Caribbean International** (www.cruisingpower.com) ships from multiple U.S. ports. A travel agent referral program includes commission.

Best described as nude social recreation, **Clothing Optional Cruises (#26)**



On ETA Motorcycle Cruises, bikers bring their own machines and ride off from a reserved gangway in ports

are a big business. **Bare Necessities Tours & Travel** (www.bare-necessities.com) pays 10 percent commission, and has designed 53 clothing-optional cruises over a 20-year period. Among the voyages is a 15-day **Celebrity Constellation** voyage from San Diego to Hawaii on March 13.

Red Hat Society (www.redhatsociety.com) is a national women's organization; its members wear red hats and purple dresses, and love conversation, activities and travel. Pitch **Red Hat and Girlfriend Getaway Cruises (#25)** to Red Hat chapters and other women's clubs.

Agents become partners in crime when booking **Murder Mystery Cruises (#24)** with **Whodunit Cruises** (www.whodunitcruises.com). Book with **Royal Caribbean** for the "Cabin and the Mystery" program; mention "Mystery Option." Cabin commission is at your agency's established cruise line rate; mystery program commission is

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Agent Advice

"Themed cruises allow the agent an opportunity to connect with clients about an idea for a cruise," says Malaka Hilton, owner of **Admiral Travel International** in Sarasota, FL. "Call it an excuse to pick up the phone as well as a great way to show your clients you understand their likes and tastes.

"Promoting our own themed cruises gives us exposure to new leads and clients," she adds. "Travelers on themed group cruises forge lasting friendships and we reap the benefits of the spin-off business."



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COVER STORY

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10 percent. "I think a mystery cruise would do well from all our [West Coast] ports," says Cruise Holidays' Allen.

Why not create Volunteerism and Charity Cruises (#23) based on "people making a difference," as Vicki Freed, senior vice president of sales, Royal Caribbean International, puts it. She says agencies have successfully set up cruises for volunteers to go ashore to help rebuild or paint a school. America's Vacation Center's Schaefer recently arranged for actresses and comedians to perform on a breast cancer awareness charity cruise. "There is no question that it is worth the extra effort. If I can get more people booked onboard and make more money on the cruise and for the charity, in the long run it pays off," she says.

All religious organizations have members who may wish to take Faith-Based Cruises (#22). The Oberammergau Passion Play, to be presented in Germany this year, should entice Christian clients. Lines like Viking River Cruises (www.vikingrivercruises.com) have created add-ons. For Jewish clients, Kosherica (www.kosherica.com), an online travel agency, has created Glatt Kosher cruises.

Fashion or antique lovers will enjoy Shopping and Antiquing Cruises (#21). Arrange onboard activities and include optional features. Seabourn Cruise Line's "Personal Shopper" service, avail-

Remembering Titanic

LOOKING AHEAD, the most poignant themed cruise may be the 100th anniversary **Titanic Memorial Cruise** (www.titanicmemorialcruise.co.uk), created by UK-based Miles Morgan Travel. Sailing on **Fred. Olsen Cruises'** (www.bortonoverseas.com) **Balmoral**, guests will visit or view ports affiliated with the ship's tragic maiden voyage as well as the spot where *Titanic* sank on April 14-15, 1912. Many cabin categories are sold out, showing how a themed cruise can hook customers who "must" sail.

able in many ports, includes a luxury car, driver and local shopping guide.

Nostalgia Cruises (#20) celebrate a past period. Cruisers will get out their poodle skirts and bobby socks for concerts and theme nights during the **Malt Shop Memories Cruise** (www.maltshopcruise.com), organized by **Sixthman** (www.sixthman.net), an affinity travel company, on a May 13 Tampa departure of *Carnival Inspiration*. Commission is 10 percent for agents who register online with Sixthman.

If classical, rock, polka, reggae or any other musical genre floats your client's boat, plug into **Musical Performance Cruises** (#19). **Cunard Line** (www.cunard.com) is partnering with The Juilliard School to present jazz performances by Juilliard students and faculty onboard certain eastbound *Queen Mary 2* transatlantic crossings.

Nothing is sweeter than a **Chocolate Cruise** (#18). **Regent Seven Seas**

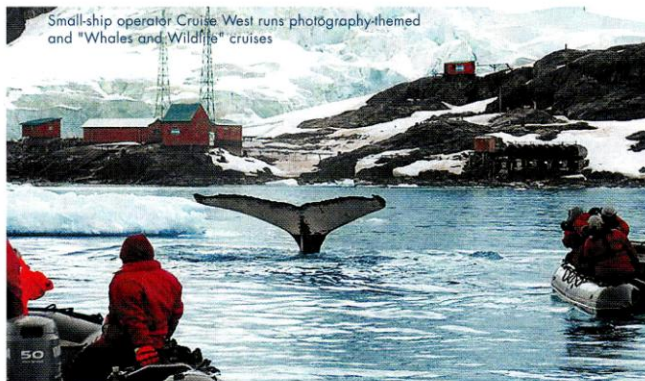
Cruises' (www.rssc.com) "Spotlight on Chocolate" cruise sails March 19 on *Seven Seas Navigator* from Port Everglades. "Everyone loves chocolate," says Kay Harwell Fernandez, travel writer and owner of **Chocolate Travel** (www.chocolate-travel.com). "As with learning about fine wine, people like to delve into chocolate, whether it's learning the history, how artisans make fine chocolates from bean to bar, or pairings with wine or other spirits."

Singles hope to meet someone special at sea or travel with like-minded individuals. As full ship charters or group cruises, **Singles Cruises** (#17) can be successful but are a sales challenge: Many singles wait until the last minute to book, reports Royal Caribbean's Freed. Dealing with an experienced operator helps. Resources include **Singles Cruise** (www.singlescruise.com), **Singles Travel International** (www.singlestravelinternational.com) and **Cruising For Love** (www.cruisingforlove.com).

Clients wanting some financial planning advice, a good investment strategy or a lucrative retirement will benefit from **Financial Cruises** (#16). Talk to banks, retirement planners and investment experts about hosting.

According to CruiseOne and Cruise Inc.'s Hattem, "another successful past theme [for his agents was built] around poker." **Gaming Cruises** (#15) might constitute casino play or board games. Kimberly Maita, an agent from Sacramento, CA, developed **Gamer Adventures** (www.gameradventures.com) for board game players. Maita's

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Small-ship operator Cruise West runs photography-themed and "Whales and Wildlife" cruises

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third annual Caribbean Gamer Cruise sails March 28 from Miami on *Carnival Glory*. Agents receive commission or a referral fee.

Romance and Vow Renewal Cruises (#14) never go out of style, and as television brings dancing nightly into consumers' living rooms, **Dancing Cruises** (#13) are two-stepping up the popularity ladder. Some agencies have designed agency-exclusive **Technology Cruises** (#12). For example, **InSight Cruises** (www.insightcruises.com), a Pasadena, CA-based travel agency, has created MacMania Cruises.

Hobby, Craft and Scrapbooking Cruises (#11) have a broad consumer appeal. Partner with a local craft store or club. "Scrapbooking is hot in the Pacific Northwest and would do great out of Seattle," believes Allen of Cruise Holidays. Royal Caribbean's Freed, too, says scrapbooking group cruises are strong this year.

Resources for agents keen on booking **Gay/Lesbian Cruises** (#10) include **RSVP Vacations** (www.rsvpvacations.com); **Olivia** (www.olivia.com), specializing in lesbian cruises; **Atlantis Events** (www.atlantisevents.com); **Toto Tours** (www.tototours.com), providing small

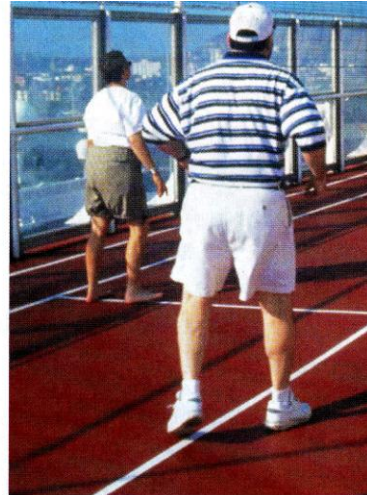
group adventures for gay men; and **David Travel** (www.davidtravel.com), offering luxury gay travel.

Freed suggests agents consider dentists, realtors or other professionals for **Continuing Education Cruises** (#9). "We do many themed cruises with groups such as traveling physicians on CME [Continuing Medical Education] trips which bring together the local and international medical communities," says Admiral Travel's Hilton.

Eco-friendly Wildlife and Nature Cruises (#8) are attracting a new generation of cruisers. Small-ship operator **Cruise West** (www.cruisewest.com) specializes in taking guests close to nature with photography-themed and "Whales and Wildlife" cruises.

Global cruise line itineraries dovetail with **Politics, World Events and History Cruises** (#7). Tap into cruise line offerings or create your own. Talk to a college or university about a professor hosting a cruise and lecturing onboard. Promote it to the institution's alumni and your database.

"There are certain fan bases that are fanatical, and these people are excellent potential customers for [Celebrity Fan Cruises (#6)] that match their interests," says Schaefer. "For example, many *Star*



Trek fans will go to any land-based convention, so why wouldn't they attend one at sea?" Separately, Angela DeDomenico, group/event specialist and franchise owner, **Cruise Planners** (www.ideserveacruise.com), Boca Raton, FL, is creating a Horror Halloween Cruise for an iconic movie actress.

Tea off for revenue with **Golfing and Sports Cruises** (#5). "[Golfers are] fanatical about their sport and when planning a golf vacation, the most important thing for them is actually playing golf," says Schaefer. The cruise is just the transportation but their spouses love the cruise activities, especially the onboard spa. Most upscale lines organize golf-themed cruises; **Silversea Cruises** (www.silversea.com) has golf programs encompassing 20 courses in 15 countries.

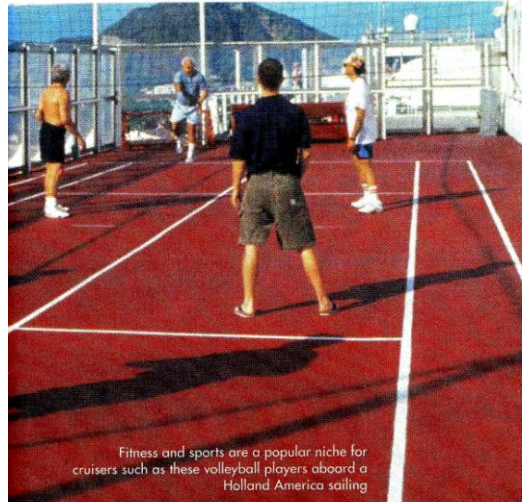
MSC Cruises (www.msccruisesusa.com) fields a lineup of "Baseball Greats" cruises that feature Q&A sessions with past players, pitching/hitting/defense strategy clinics, a passenger pitching contest and trivia games. Sailings from Port Everglades are on March 6, April 3, November 14 and December 5.

Fans of a renowned musical artist or group will love **Tribute Cruises** (#4). Cruise Planners' DeDomenico has developed a **Beatles Tribute Cruise** (www.beatletributecruise.com) sailing March 28 on *Independence of the Seas*; Cruise Planners agencies may sell it. It features BritBeat, a Beatles tribute band; May

The Top 30 Countdown

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| 30. Motorcycle Cruises | 15. Gaming Cruises |
| 29. Book Cruises | 14. Romance/Vow Renewals |
| 28. Film Cruises | 13. Dancing Cruises |
| 27. Medical Cruises | 12. Technology Cruises |
| 26. Clothing-Optional Cruises | 11. Hobby, Craft and Scrapbooking Cruises |
| 25. Girlfriend Getaways | 10. Gay/Lesbian Cruises |
| 24. Murder Mystery Cruises | 9. Continuing Education Cruises |
| 23. Volunteerism/Charity Cruises | 8. Wildlife and Nature Cruises |
| 22. Faith-Based Cruises | 7. Politics/World Event/History Cruises |
| 21. Shopping/Antiquing | 6. Celebrity Fan Cruises |
| 20. Nostalgia Cruises | 5. Golf and Sports Cruises |
| 19. Musical Performance Cruises | 4. Tribute Cruises |
| 18. Chocolate Cruises | 3. Wellness/Yoga Cruises |
| 17. Singles Cruises | 2. Wine Cruises |
| 16. Financial Cruises | 1. Culinary Cruises |

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Fitness and sports are a popular niche for cruisers such as these volleyball players aboard a Holland America sailing

Pang, John Lennon's former girlfriend; and Chris O'Dell, author of *My Hard Days and Long Nights with the Beatles*.

Clients are flocking to **Wellness & Yoga Cruises** (#3) to de-stress. **Crystal Cruises** (www.crystalcruises.com) Mind, Body and Spirit cruise departs April 26 from Singapore. Optional Crystal Adventures ashore include personal meetings with Buddhist monks, therapeutic spa rituals and a meditation center visit. Onboard, experts talk on life balance, Tai Chi, yoga and family health.

Wine Cruises (#2) rank very high with the agents we surveyed. "We have developed a particular niche in offering wine-themed cruises that have encompassed special onboard events coupled with private shore excursions," says Bob Miller, owner Cruise Holidays, Alexandria, VA. "Some of these clients were new to cruising, and only chose to experience their first cruise because of its theme." Miller's agency often offers wine-themed cruises on upscale cruise lines, usually **Oceania Cruises** (www.oceaniacruises.com).

European river cruise operators and ocean lines both offer a plethora of savory wine cruises. For example, **Avalon Waterways** (www.avalonwaterways.com) has multiple wine-themed itineraries between August and October with tastings, events and winery visits.

And the winner is ...

From the earliest era of modern cruising, people have cruised "for the food" while dining in elegant surroundings. Today's client tastes, however, are even more discerning, so all cruise lines have raised the bar on their onboard culinary offerings and many have added immersive **Culinary Cruises** (#1). For instance, Holland America organizes a portfolio of culinary cruises with more than 70 guest chefs creating programs in its Culinary Arts Centers.

"Culinary and wine [cruises] have the strongest appeal," Admiral Travel's Hilton says. Miller concurs, "Wine, culinary, and wellness/Yoga cruises would be our top three." Most lines have substantive options on culinary cruises.

Visit www.travelagentcentral.com for more examples. ■