

Crime on cruiseships makes big news and can deal a hefty blow to the value of a brand. Maintaining high standards means starting at the recruitment stage, Regent Seven Seas' Christian Sauleau tells Jim Banks.



# Screen test

The cruise industry constantly needs staff. Some onboard positions are filled with seasonal or temporary workers, and staff turnover can be high in many areas. Concern over the potential for individuals with criminal intent to get jobs on vessels bubbles to the surface whenever a cruise crime story hits the headlines, and the industry is periodically forced to take a fresh look at its security and safety policies.

Among cruise lines, the level of commitment to tackling the rare incidents of crime committed by staff is good. While those incidents that do occur tend to be high-profile, the industry

generally takes seriously all concerns over crime, be it theft, attack, smuggling or sexual harassment.

## Media watch

Security issues have come to the fore since 2001, and the industry has responded with significant investment in infrastructure, technology, policy and procedure, but this does not give cruise operators latitude to neglect their other responsibilities in the area of passenger safety. In fact, it emphasises the need for safety and security to begin at the first stages of the recruitment phase and continue through to monitoring staff as they perform their

onboard duties. There may still be the occasional 'crime' headline, but the industry boasts a good track record so far.

'The issue of crime against passengers is overblown,' says Christian Sauleau, executive vice president of operations for Regent Seven Seas. 'People may think the problem is getting worse, but you have to put that in perspective. There are now hundreds of vessels, but the incidence of crime at sea is around 0.2%. That compares well with any tourism business.'

Sauleau recognises that the cruise industry's approach to reporting crime is part of the reason people's perception may be slightly skewed. He points out that

cruise operators have been extremely open about any incident of crime – whether committed by staff or passengers – and this well-intentioned transparency may highlight the issue too often.

‘The industry is committed to reporting all crime onboard and doesn’t try to hide anything,’ remarks Sauleau.

This clarity often extends to the internal processes of cruise operators, as they implement their policies on security and standards of quality from the earliest stage of recruitment.

### Early warning

Unfortunately, one does not have to look far back to see the potential damage that can be caused by criminals working on cruiseships. For example, in 2006 the high-profile trial of nine people accused of smuggling narcotics on the US-based *Mariner of the Seas* was highlighted in the media. State authorities had discovered what it saw as a major operation using the vessel to carry large amounts of marijuana and cocaine between St Maarten, Aruba and Miami.

Such large-scale operations are rare, but they highlight the risks cruise operators must mitigate when hiring staff. They must also remember that for passengers, crimes of a smaller scale than drug smuggling are just as distressing and harmful. For Sauleau, the answer is vigilance and a coordinated approach.

‘We work closely with government agencies and call for them to bring in sniffer dogs if ever there is any suspicion of drugs on a vessel,’ he says. ‘If a guest tries to smuggle something we are very strict, and there are no big cases now. We also tell our crew to be vigilant, though we must find the right balance for passengers between security and comfort.’

Staff screening is the first weapon a cruise line has to ensure that it hires the best people. There are many kinds of checks that can be performed to validate an applicant’s identity and work history. Personal histories and references must be followed up as well as enquiries to detect criminal records.

‘In the last three years we have made serious background checking on all staff,’ says Sauleau. ‘But part of this is because staff on our ships in US waters need to go through the process of visa applications, which itself involves thorough checks.’

Any anomaly in any of these searches should immediately raise a red flag. If the process is done with rigour, it goes a long way to stopping the possibility of crime by staff at the earliest opportunity.

‘One or two may still slip through, but the industry just has to keep on following the right procedures,’ he adds.

### Holistic approach

While background checks are valuable, they alone will not suffice if a cruise line is to optimise its human resources (HR) policy to meet safety and security goals. Cruise lines must instill a culture of security and passenger safety in any candidate who makes it through the selection process.

‘The process must start at the recruitment stage, when all applicants are screened, but it needs to then continue with onboard training,’ comments Sauleau. ‘Safety is the number one service that we must

Sauleau. ‘Safety training develops over the years and we must stay up to date. We also have to look at the best way to train different people of different nationalities. We have to ensure that there is regular training on safety and security issues, and specific issues such as sexual harassment or narcotics, particularly for young crew members.’

To maintain its high standards, the industry must make sure that its policy begins with a rigorous selection and screening process that sets the tone for all its safety and security processes thereafter.



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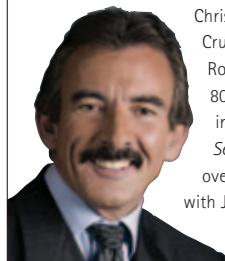
provide to our guests and our crew.’

For Regent Seven Seas this means having an education and HR officer on each vessel to ensure the right safety and security training is given to all staff. These officers assist the cruise line’s department heads with the ongoing development of training programmes.

‘The industry is very proactive in terms of education and recruitment,’ notes

‘Training is perhaps more important even than screening and recruitment,’ adds Sauleau. ‘Like any industry, you might get one or two bad apples, but they are always spotted quickly. Taking a cruise is one of the safest ways to take a vacation. There are very few incidents on cruises. The industry might be under scrutiny, but that just helps us to do a better job.’ wc

#### Christian Sauleau profile



Christian Sauleau is executive vice president of operations for Regent Seven Cruises. He has a long experience in the hotel and cruise industries starting with Royal Viking line, one of the leaders in luxury cruiseships in the late 1970s and 80s. In 1998, Sauleau joined Radisson, now Regent Seven Seas Cruises, and was instrumental in the development and the launch of the fleet’s new vessels: *Seven Seas Navigator*, *Seven Seas Mariner* and *Seven Seas Voyager*, and oversees the overall operations of the vessels. Sauleau was also instrumental in the partnership with Jean Michel Cousteau Ocean Futures Society as part of the fleet environmental programme, which benefits and educates both guests and crew.