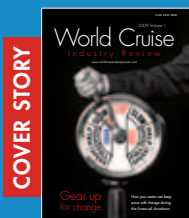




Royal Caribbean's FlowRider is a new concept for the cruise line.



### Cruise lines can broaden their appeal by:

- offering diverse and healthy dining options
- nurturing younger cruise passengers with exciting concepts
- challenging conventions with innovative designs

# Meet the next generation

Faced with a broadening passenger demographic, growing consumer expectations and a restrictive economic outlook, cruise lines have to be creative in how they meet these demands.

Carolyn Spencer Brown, editor-in-chief of consumer website [CruiseCritic.co.uk](http://CruiseCritic.co.uk), reveals her thoughts on how to satisfy the modern passenger during hard times.

To understand what cruise passengers want you only have to look at the latest new builds. Cruise lines are doing a good job of reflecting and catering for the demands of the modern passenger, the main one being choice. The modern-day cruiser wants a range of options in everything from staterooms to leisure activities.

Passengers also want healthier options, in both menu choices and leisure activities. They also want to be entertained with concepts new to the ship environment. But these needs are always changing, and the latest question on everybody's lips is, of course, the economy. How will it affect passenger cruise habits?

#### Cruise crunch?

*Cruise Critic* recently looked into this question, asking if people were still going

to cruise; and if they were, what kind of changes, if any, would they make? Would they cut back on certain things?

The website's poll revealed 90% of respondents are still enthusiastic about cruising in spite of the financial crisis, although they are going to make adjustments in other areas.

One of the most popular ways to cut costs, according to the respondents, was to cruise from a nearby home port rather than fly to a foreign port. This is already having an effect on cruise itineraries, many of which are shifting from Europe to the Caribbean for next summer.

Passengers are also taking less exotic cruises. For the last several years, *Cruise Critic* has highlighted the growing popularity of exotic cruise destinations such as Australia or Asia, and I think people are cutting back on those big time. You can already see

cruise lines responding, pulling out of their 2010 itineraries in these areas.

#### Nickel and diming

When I first started cruising a decade ago, there was a lot of fuss about 'nickel and diming'. To me, nickel and diming is when cruise lines make passengers pay for things that were traditionally included as part of the cruise fare. It is commonplace to charge extra for certain foods, restaurants or services on board, but passengers are very sensitive to it. One of the most vehement arguments on *Cruise Critic's* community message boards is about the price of alcohol, and the fact that you are not allowed to bring your own drink on board. Our message board users are convinced it is a case of nickel and diming.

However, I think the psychology is changing. Passengers are beginning to

realise that if they want the choice to opt in or out of these additional luxuries, then they are going to have to pay for it. And \$30 for a unique dining experience on board is a small price to pay.

Cruise ships are sometimes unable to handle the demand for these extra amenities and services, which is the main reason they up the cost: for crowd control.

Cruise lines have to ensure their core product offers enough for passengers to still have a good time without making them shell out more money.

### Meeting the change

An exciting trend in the industry is that as cruise ships become more family-oriented, kids are coming into cruising much earlier, forming positive associations that will hopefully develop throughout their adult life.

I think it is important for cruise lines to nurture this and invest in things that attract the younger generation, such as the FlowRider surf simulator on Royal Caribbean International (RCI), or the bowling alleys on Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL). It is going to be interesting to see how their tastes develop.

As for attracting new passengers, one thing that you really do not have to sell in

the cruise industry is the romance of being at sea.

There is nothing like being on a ship in the middle of the ocean, even if you're not as cut off from life as you used to be because of the internet and mobile phones. It is still the most amazing experience that a land-based resort will never be able to compete with.

That said, I think it is important for cruise lines to create something about them that is special and reflects what they stand for to attract their particular market; RCI, for example, is about recreation and having fun; Princess Cruises is about romance; and NCL is all about flexibility.

### The attraction of new concepts

Cruise ships are constantly challenging conventions with design, which is crucial because new concepts spark interest.

I think RCI is one of the most innovative lines out there in terms of design. It is constantly trying new things. Its *Oasis of the Seas* is based on a New York City 'neighbourhood' concept, and has a carousel and an AquaTheatre. The cruise line's Voyager- and Freedom-class ships were the first to introduce an ice skating rink. Even *Celebrity Cruises* was onto

something when it introduced the Lawn Club on *Celebrity Solstice*. What had initially sounded kitsch is in fact really fabulous. It is so centring and lovely to have a piece of nature on a cruise ship; you can have a picnic, play games or just stroll and relax.

These innovative features are really going to transform cruise ships of the future. *Cruise Critic* conducted a poll a while ago asking people what they would want to see on the cruise ships of the future.

We came up with a roller coaster, a beach and a revolving rooftop restaurant. The last one got the most votes and is probably the most likely to happen. Unfortunately, I do not think there would be quite enough space for a roller coaster. [wc](#)

#### Carolyn Spencer Brown

Carolyn Spencer Brown is the editor of *Cruise Critic.co.uk*, the industry's most prominent outlet for consumer-oriented cruise travel information. *Cruise Critic* has the most heavily trafficked cruise message boards on the web, with over 110,000 registered members.



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