

## What's New at Sea for Meetings and Incentives

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Haven't planned a cruise meeting lately, or ever? We've got an overview of trends, a guide to ship categories, and lots of photos to give you a feel for the state of cruising today. Customize your corner of a mega ship, charter a smaller ship and create your own itinerary, or anything in between. Here's what's new:



The Serenity Retreat Deck on the 2,624-passenger Carnival Sunshine

### 1. Wi-Fi and Internet

Everyone knows people don't unplug anymore—ever. So, connectivity-wise, why should sailing in the middle of the ocean be any different from walking down a city street or sitting in your own kitchen? Cruise lines realize that it shouldn't, and they have tossed out their old hotspots in favor of “bow to stern” Wi-Fi.



Earlier this year, for example, Royal Caribbean announced a new satellite network in operation on the 2,706-room Oasis of the Seas and Allure of the Seas (and to come on 2,090-room Quantum of the Seas, launching later this year). The network gives the ships overall bandwidth of 500 Mbps and passengers a connectivity experience as robust as on land—but with the cell “tower” (in fact a medium-range satellite), some 4,900 miles over their heads.

Of course, getting the connectivity is one thing, controlling costs is another. Prices vary, but on most ships the value option is to pre-pay for a block of minutes rather than choosing the per-minute, pay-as-you-go plan.



**Viking’s Longships feature the Aquavit Terrace, an indoor/outdoor area at the bow of the ship for viewing, relaxing, and casual dining**

## **2. The New Riverboats**

“Riverboats are booming,” says Jo Kling, CEO of Seasite.com (<http://www.seasiteblog.com/>) and president of Landry & Kling Events at Sea (<http://landrykling.com/>), noting that 36 new river vessels came into service this year. “At only 100 to 150 guests, they’re so ‘charterable,’” which gives incentive programs privacy, exclusivity, and a streamlined way to include multiple destinations in one rewarding itinerary. “Your travelers don’t have to pack and unpack,” she says. “They can see several destinations without losing time to logistics.”

Riverboats are prevalent in Europe but are also operating in Asia. And American Cruise Lines has a new boat plying the Columbia and Snake rivers in the Pacific Northwest, tracing the route of Lewis & Clark.



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While riverboats don't have big-name entertainment or the spectacular shows of some of the larger ocean-going vessels, they have the advantage of showcasing local cuisine and wines, as well as entertainers who can come on board at your ports of call. "It's more evocative of the local culture," Kling says, "and it's a change of pace." Tip: Berlitz this month released its first-ever guide to river cruising in Europe (<http://www.insightguides.com/product/berlitz-river-cruising-in-europe/9781780047720>), ranking the lines: AmaWaterways comes out on top overall, followed by Viking River Cruises.

### **3. Indoor/Outdoor Spaces & Street Scenes**

Traditionally, you wouldn't find public spaces along the side decks of ships. Now, you'll find indoor spaces that open up to outdoor spaces on the sides of ships, such as at the Sugarcane Mojito Bar on the Norwegian Getaway.

On some of the larger ships, Kling says, it can feel as if you are strolling down a Manhattan street or plunked down on The Strip in Las Vegas as you drop in to a piano bar for a drink, stop by a noodle shop for a snack, or have dinner at a restaurant helmed by a celebrity chef.



**A deluxe balcony stateroom on the Regal Princess**

### **4. Cruise Lines Want to Go Green**

This spring, the Cruise Lines International Association released a report on the industry's efforts to become more environmentally conscious in its operations. These include advanced wastewater treatment and improvements in reducing onboard energy consumption. Find the full report ([http://www.cruising.org/regulatory/news/press\\_releases/2014/04/cruise-industry-highlights-](http://www.cruising.org/regulatory/news/press_releases/2014/04/cruise-industry-highlights-)

ongoing-sustainability-efforts-fully-protect-) at CruiseForward.org, where you also can read about how cruise lines are driving “meaningful change around the globe,” not only with regard to the environment.

## 5. Overnight in Port

Some of the smaller ships are doing more overnights in ports, allowing shore excursions to last later into the night so passengers can enjoy the nightlife of, say, Mykonos. (Of course, your group can plan to stay wherever it wants as long as it wants when you charter a ship, Kling notes.) You can keep up with all the ships, trends, and cruising news at Seasite.com (<http://www.seasite.com>).

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