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# OFF DUTY

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Dan Neil finds the Lucid Air irresistible, warts and all **D13**



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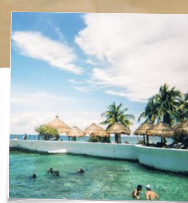
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Saturday/Sunday, April 22 - 23, 2023 | **D1**

## MILLENNIALS ROCK THE BOAT

As cruise lines navigate back to normal, they're finding a surprising new wave of customers: millennial and Gen Z travelers. These younger passengers have their own reasons for thinking the boating life is cool. We sent a reporter to discover what they are.



**SHORT SAIL** On a recent four-day trip from Tampa, Fla., to Cozumel, Mexico, the writer snapped photos of Gen Z and millennial shipmates on the Carnival Pride. From left: A guest lounges on deck; travelers on a shore visit; the onboard waterslide; a dip in the Caribbean Sea. Above: The author poses on Holland America Line's MS Rotterdam in New York Harbor.

By SARA BOSWORTH

**O**N EASTER MONDAY, atop the deck of a 963-foot cruise ship floating somewhere north of Cancún, Mexico, Macda Hailu and DeShun Gilchrist were planning their evening. On the agenda: dinner, a comedy show, then hitting the club.

The couple was there to celebrate Mr. Gilchrist's 26th birthday. "It's my first cruise," said Ms. Hailu, a 24-year-old audi-

tor from Byron, Ga. "It's a good time. Lots of things to do." The trip had its surprises, however. "There's a lot of little kids. Sometimes I'll need to watch my language. I'll turn around and there's an 8-year-old behind me," she said.

The pair was lured by a ceaseless flow of tropical drinks, an all-you-can-eat buffet, three pools, a casino and more—all included in one price. They are part of a generation exposed to cruises in the early 2000s, when companies increased their family-friendly programming. They had

now returned on their own dime.

Among them: me. The difference was this was my first cruise, having grown up with a father as scared of deep water as my mother is of being confined to any one place for more than a few hours. With four days on board the Carnival Pride, sailing from Tampa to Cozumel and back, I was curious to see why millennials and Gen Zers were paying \$1,000 and up for week-long trips to a number of far-flung places (See "See-Worthy Spots," page D4).

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AMBER REED (WALLGUM)

# ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

## Since When Do Millennials Like Cruises?



**OH BUOY!** While in port at Cozumel, Mexico, the author photographed a cruise ship docked nearby.

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Cruise ships have historically been havens for snowbird retirees and multigenerational family reunions, both parties drawn to their efficiency and relative affordability. But increasingly, those advantages are attracting people like me, a 20-something tourist looking to spend a few days in the sun without decimating her savings. Cruises are a tempting bang-for-your-buck option, cramming as much as possible into a few precious vacation days. The boat hops islands and passengers spend afternoons exploring port cities with scenic selfie spots. When the boat departs, the guests return to food galore, water parks, concerts and more. Options at the lower end of the price range hover at \$100 per night, including food.

Young customers are most often on board to celebrate, for a birthday, gradu-

marketing officer at Royal Caribbean International. According to the Cruise Lines International Association, millennial customers—the generation famous for spending their money on experiences rather than things—are the most likely age group to say they intend to cruise again.

“When I was a kid, I was scared of cruises,” said Jonathan Brown, 25. “I’ve seen ‘Titanic.’” But during Covid lockdown, the New York City restaurant manager found himself stuck at home watching travel videos on TikTok and YouTube. Again and again, the algorithms served him cruise ships. “I was like, this is a different method of traveling than I’ve been used to,” said Mr. Brown. In 2022, he took a four-day Caribbean cruise with his best friend. A few months later, he booked his second.

“The main idea that drew me in

ing sunbathing session.

In their effort to get people like Ms. Shomer and Mr. Brown out to sea, some lines make their cruises available only to those 21 and up. Virgin Voyages, an adult-only cruise line, offers a karaoke lounge, Korean barbecue and even a tattoo parlor called Squid Ink. Trips are planned using an “emotional journey bible,” linking activities and even music to guests’ projected moods, catering to a generation attuned to their feelings.

Cruise companies are also adjusting their advertising techniques to suit the younger audience. Royal Caribbean promoted their newest ship within the popular videogame Fortnite. Videos on Carnival Cruise’s TikTok account use the format of popular memes and trends on the app, featuring bright-eyed 20-somethings texting their new “cruise besties.” Virgin Voyages incited a viral TikTok dance challenge with choreography set to “Karma Chameleon” that had little to do with cruises, but ended up being more than twice as effective as their standard ads, the company said.

“I might actually watch an entire 30-minute vlog of a Carnival cruise, versus 30 seconds of a Carnival commercial,” said Mr. Brown. “I would say [social media] makes up at least 50% of the decision on whether or not I’m going to go somewhere.”

Social-media use reflects young travelers’ piqued interest. On Pinterest, searches among users between ages 18 and 24 for “cruise vibes” and “luxury cruise” increased 145% and 95%, respectively, over the last year. TikTok videos with the hashtag #cruisetok have garnered more than one billion views.

Younger travelers may discover cruises on social media, but once on board, unplugging is easy. I gave up on trying to open Slack on day two of flickering Wi-Fi and found a couple of hours of solace on my room’s balcony, watching the waves.

“I think we were just so overloaded with the reality of the world around us that we—I think especially millennials—have found our own, like, little escape culture,” said Ms. Shomer, the astrologist. “And a cruise is like the ultimate escape. You are in the middle of the ocean.”

**Nowadays, millennial customers—the generation famous for spending their money on experiences rather than things—are the most likely age group to say they intend to cruise again.**

tion, work promotion or even a divorce, said Nathan Rosenberg, the chief brand officer at Virgin Voyages. He described a newly minted 30-something divorcee on a cruise with about a dozen friends: “She walked to the edge of the ship and threw her ring into the ocean.” For a crew vacation on masse, cruises offer everyone plenty of space and places to eat, stake out a pair of deck chairs, sip a kale-aca-turmeric-protein booster or gossip in the infrared sauna.

Cruises have upped their long-weekend itineraries, also more doable for younger workers with limited vacation time. On a Celebrity Beyond ship, interior designer Nate Berkus revamped the Sunset Bar with palm-front wallpaper, a look popular with younger, retro-obsessed crowds. Royal Caribbean debuted an eatery serving brunch called “The Mason Jar,” invoking a persistent symbol of artisanal hipsterdom.

So far, it seems to be working. “We see more millennials and Gen Z sailing with us than ever before,” said Kara Wallace, chief

was being able to sample different locations,” said Mr. Brown. “I don’t have to necessarily book a full trip to Puerto Rico. I can go and test it out for a couple of hours.”

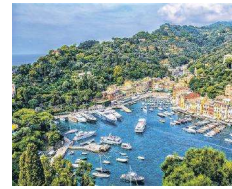
Young workers in the midst of building their careers are happy to hand off planning to a cruise package that has completely mapped out daily activities.

“[Cruising] hearkens to simpler times—before we had to make any sort of decisions or employ any critical thinking,” said Jordan Shomer, 34, a professional astrologist in Austerlitz, N.Y., who joined a group of friends on a cruise in February. “The idea of having to make even the decisions for the itinerary was too much for me,” she said.

For me, a perennial over-thinker, this forced go-with-the-flow mentality was the most unexpected bonus. Every evening, the cruise’s app told me where and when I would eat dinner. The hardest decision I had to make over the course of four days was which deck chair to pick for my morn-

## See-Worthy Spots

The five destinations to which millennials and Gen Zers are cruising—and why—according to advisers affiliated with Virtuoso, a global network of travel planners



Portofino, a port stop in Italy.

### The Mediterranean

“A cruise to multiple countries makes it an affordable way to travel the world,” said Jessica Griscavage of Runway Travel, based in Springfield, Va.

**SHIP AHOY** The Celebrity Edge ship hits seven ports in Italy, Spain and France in seven days. From \$1,099. [CelebrityCruises.com](#)

### Alaska

Adults-only cruises are popular for millennials heading to hike and fish as well as see glaciers, wildlife and historic gold-mining towns like Juneau, according to Ruth Turpin, owner of Cruise, Etc., in Ft. Worth, Texas.

**SHIP AHOY** The Oceania Regatta’s Alaska Wayfarer itinerary offers that. From \$1,700 for seven days. [OceaniaCruises.com](#)



The Greek Island of Santorini

### Greek Isles

Island-hopping in Greece offers both beach days and sightseeing days,” said Nancy Yale, founder of Cruise and World Travel based in Fairfield, Conn.

**SHIP AHOY** Virgin Voyages’ eight-day Greek Island Glow cruise hits Santorini, Rhodes and Mykonos. From \$2,790. [VirginVoyages.com](#)

### Galápagos Islands

The Ecuadorian archipelago offers a rich history and unique wildlife. “Cruising is more than buffets and pina colodas for millennials,” said Stephanie Goldberg-Glazer, owner of Live Well Travel, based in Key West, Fla.

**SHIP AHOY** A week-long trip on the Silver Origin explores the islands with a team of experts. From \$13,400. [SilverSea.com](#)



St. John, in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

### The Caribbean

Like most, young travelers like smaller islands big ships can’t access, so there are less people, said Lesley Cohen, SmartFlyer in Tampa, Fla.

**SHIP AHOY** The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection’s Evrima cruises to St. Barts, St. Kitts and St. John. From \$4,500 for five days. [RitzCarltonYachtCollection.com](#)

—Donna Bulseco



## A Boatload Of Fun

Movies set on cruise ships span all genres, said Charlie Tabesh, SVP of programming for Turner Classic Movies, from “comedy and romance to serious drama and disaster movies.” Here, a cinematic sampling, plus the newest in the cruise canon.



**1931 ‘Monkey Business’**  
**THE PLOT** Four stowaways get mixed up with sketchy characters while creating havoc on an ocean liner. “Fun and wacky, it’s a good use of the stage setting,” said Mr. Tabesh about the Marx Brothers’ barrel-of-laugh romp. “In the 1930s, the life of luxury portrayed cinematically on a cruise was pure escapism,” added Mr. Tabesh, who also mentioned 1937’s ‘Shall We Dance,’ with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.



**1942 ‘Now, Voyager’**  
**THE PLOT** The character of Charlotte Vale (Bette Davis) goes through such a transformation on the cruise, a place of freedom and liberation, where she’s away from her controlling mother, who has kept her down,” said Mr. Tabesh. With the help of a psychiatrist, Dr. Jaquith (Claude Rains), who suggests the cruise, and then her married-lover shipmate, “Charlotte becomes a sophisticated woman,” he said.



**1953 ‘Gentlemen Prefer Blondes’**  
**THE PLOT** Two gorgeous gals head to Paris on the Isle de Paris ocean liner, titillating the eligible men on board, including the American Olympic team. Mr. Tabesh praises the film’s music and dancing, which includes Marilyn Monroe’s performance of “Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend.” But he insists it’s the story, from a 1926 novel by Anita Loos, “that makes you pay attention to this very funny movie.”



**1997 ‘Titanic’**  
**THE PLOT** This epic romance/disaster flick charts the course of two lovers aboard the luxury cruise ship that sank on April 15, 1912. “It’s not one of my favorites,” said Mr. Tabesh, “but James Cameron’s ‘big’ movie captures the details of what a story would look like at the time and the mix of classes thrown together in a tragedy.” Indeed, the film has survived the test of time better than 1972’s “Poseidon Adventure.”



**2022 ‘Triangle of Sadness’**  
**THE PLOT** Influencers and entitled Euros implode on a luxury cruise. “Ruben Ostlund’s film gets at the idea that luxury is exploitative. It also plays to the guilt we feel being drawn in by it,” said Charles Bramescio, whose book “Colors of Film: The Story of Cinema in 50 Palattes” (Quarto, 2023) looks at how visual cues contribute to a film’s meaning. —D.B.  
► For more cruise films, go to [wsj/travel.com](#).