

IN-STORE

Crystal Cruises bolsters CRM with volunteer excursion program addition

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By TRICIA CARR

Crystal Cruises is providing guests with more opportunities within the brand's ashore volunteer program by adding complimentary excursions to European itineraries stopping at Ukraine, Italy and Spain.

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The cruise line's You Care, We Care program lets guests and crew members participate in daily excursions designed to give back to communities near ports of call. The new additions will let consumers volunteer with local efforts such as a social services center and a gardener-training program.

"Crystal Cruises is introducing our guests to something unexpected in a destination, which creates memories and helps strengthen our bond with our guests," said Mimi Weisband, vice president of public relations at [Crystal Cruises](#), Los Angeles.

"This is something families have shared together," she said. "Travelers can come back from their day ashore and this empowers them to provide a different view of a region.

"Even those who are not cruising with us are impressed that we offer this."

Any volunteers?

Volunteers in the You Care, We Care program spend four to seven hours of their trip

ashore aiding communities.

The new programs in Ukraine, Italy and Spain will add to those previously planned at ports in Greece, Estonia, Norway, Croatia, Germany and Ireland in 2012.



Crystal guests prepare food to feed rescued sea turtles in Athens

The cruise line added You Care, We Care excursions at port stops in Odessa, Ukraine; Sorrento and Naples, Italy; and Valencia and Barcelona, Spain.

For example, travelers can assist the homeless at a local social services center in Odessa. Also, Crystal Cruises offers guests the opportunity to volunteer with the Pio Monte della Misericordia brotherhood charity in Sorrento and Naples.

At a port in Valencia, guests can tend to the gardens and greenhouses of Olacau's AIDEM Association, which supports disabled persons by growing medicinal and aromatic plants as well as providing job training for gardeners.

Lastly, travelers can volunteer to protect endangered marine life at the CRAM Foundation in Barcelona.

The You Care, We Care program launched last year to create an environment for understanding and caring about cultures, places, animals and people in a way that traditional shore excursions do not, per Crystal Cruises.

Crystal Cruises offers one or more volunteer excursions free for guests on each Crystal Serenity and Crystal Symphony cruise. The programs are posted on the brand's Web site approximately six months prior to each trip and guests can sign up once on-board.

You Care, We Care excursions are also promoted in the brand's 2013 Cruise Atlas and via social media.

In fact, the brand recently posted photos from past programs in an album on its [Facebook page](#) titled, "You Care, We Care Voluntourism Excursions."

"We think this speaks to the philanthropic values of our guests," Ms. Weisband said.

"Many are patrons of nonprofit medical, cultural and rescue organizations," she said. "They are giving back in their communities and enjoy balancing the luxury of their vacation with giving back to the destinations they visit."

A new beginning

Crystal Cruises is in the midst of a rebranding effort called Begin a New Story that focuses on consumer storytelling.

The multichannel campaign covering print, digital and mobile marketing channels will focus on the notion of the travel journal and encourage consumers to share memories from past cruises ([see story](#)).

Crystal Cruises' use of experiences, rather than highlighting ship amenities, seems to be evident in its You Care, We Care programs, and it makes sense that the brand would add to its excursions at this time.

Guests may also be pleasantly surprised at the programs' free price tag.

"Most of us want to have all the amenities that a luxury cruise can provide, versus an extended trip for the only purpose of volunteering several weeks at a time," said D.M. Banks, director of [DMB Public Relations](#), New York. "This provides the level of vacation we desire while allowing a day to be given to these rewarding philanthropy opportunities.

"Knowing that an average cruise is between seven and 14 days, taking a half-day or full-day for an experience like this can certainly be desirable to many luxury consumers," he said. "Most of us all serve in some capacity with local charities and nonprofits, so including a few hours to give back while on vacation can certainly work for these travel brands.

"Ports of call are vital to the success of these brands, so keeping these communities pleased and enriched will only enhance the value of the brand in the eyes of these community leaders and many of the guests who wish to become involved."

Final Take

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