

IN-STORE

Crystal Cruises entices bookings through brand-exclusive experiences

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By TRICIA CARR

Crystal Cruises is eyeing affluent travelers by offering exclusive Mediterranean excursions on its spring itineraries that cannot be accessed through other travel brands.

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The cruise line's new collection of experiences called "Boutique Adventures" will be available this spring for groups ranging from one to 15 travelers on Crystal Symphony and Crystal Serenity ships sailing to the Mediterranean. Guests will have exclusive access to estates, art studios, museums, castles and businesses.

"Our guests are looking for different ways to experience destinations and they relish insider access," said Mimi Weisband, vice president of public relations at **Crystal Cruises**, Los Angeles. "We are continually challenging our tour operators to seek out the unusual, experiential, intimate, cultural adventures.

"Our guests do not want a mass-market excursion – they will pay more for something if it is unique and authentic," she said.

Cruising the Mediterranean

There are seven Boutique Adventures that guests can choose. The cost ranges from \$223 to more than \$1,000 per guest.

Travelers can book the excursions online up to six months before their cruise.

The Florence excursion comprises a viewing of the Uffizi Gallery's private Contini Bonacossi Collection, which is not accessible to the public.

In Funchal, Portugal, guests will have lunch with a local celebrity at Reid's Palace or visit a family-run Madeiran winery where they will dine with the owners.

During the Rome experience, guests will make their own jewelry with instruction from a former Valentino model who now designs jewelry.

The Corfu, Greece, excursion consists of a painting lesson from the president of the Corfu Painters Society.

In Italy's Vetriano, guests will attend the opera at Teatro Concordia, the smallest public theater in the world.



Teatro Concordia

Excursions in Sorrento and Taormina, Italy, comprise cooking lessons and meals with local, Michelin-star chefs.

In Taormina in Italy's Sicily region, travelers will be served a meal while watching a classical concert at a Sicilian castle.

Crystal Cruises will promote the Boutique Adventures via its Web site, quarterly magazine and the on-board Shore Excursion team, per Ms. Weisband.

In addition, travel agents will also inform their clients about the experiences.

"The cruise industry has been becoming more aware of the large portion of the affluent travelers who shy away from cruises due to many misconceptions and overall lack of

desire to be on-board the mega-ships," said D.M. Banks, director at **DMB Public Relations**, New York.

"Crystal Cruises is always looking at ways to provide the luxuries of cruises, while providing a boutique experience for their guests," he said. "This is another example of them thinking outside of the box to truly connect with their guests.

"Affluent travelers are more than happy to pay a premium for superior services and, more importantly, unique and personalized experiences. These intimate and semi-private excursions are great ways for guest to feel more immersed into the culture and destinations while at port."

Story time

The new Boutique Adventures are meant to align with Crystal Cruises' "Begin a New Story" ad campaign that launched last year, per Ms. Weisband.

The cruise line rebranded itself during the second quarter of 2012 through an all-encompassing campaign that centers on the notion of the travel journal and encourages consumers to share memories from past cruises.

The marketing efforts focus on cruise destinations and once-in-a-lifetime experiences, rather than the amenities of the ship.

Begin a New Story uses multiple channels including print ads with digital watermark technology, brochures, online banner ads, email, video and a smartphone app.

For instance, print ads appear in Condé Nast Traveler, National Geographic Traveler, Town & Country, Travel & Leisure, Coastal Living, Elle Décor, Food & Wine and Forbes Life.

Consumers can scan the ads with their smartphones to reveal a 60-second video that shows three travelers' experiences in select Crystal Cruises' destinations through watercolor animation.

The brand asked eight watercolor artists to create images that are used in all aspects of the campaign (**see story**).

"The trend for affluent consumers is more intimate and incredibly special – both of which are key to these excursions," Ms. Weisband said.

"Entering someone's home, sharing a meal with them and just a few other guests, and being able to hear in-depth stories of living and working in that area from your host – these are experiences that can be deeply personal, bonding and memorable, really expanding one's understanding of a culture far beyond any info gleaned from merely sight-seeing," she said.

"Affluent consumers crave such experiences that go beyond the norm, as so many of them travel at a level well above the basics."

Final Take

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