



Isn't It Time For a Cruise Close to Home?

MANY OF US THINK of a cruise as a romantic trip to somewhere far away and exotic – or at least different from what we see and do at home in our daily lives. Our travelers may be dreaming of the day they can board a sea-going cruise ship to historic ports of the Mediterranean or the colorful islands of the Caribbean. But perhaps just thinking of traveling so far from home, or being so distanced from family and friends or the safety of known surroundings, may make them push this trip to the back burner in order of priorities in their lives.

Yet, perhaps you could bring the cruise experience to these same close-to-home folks if you lured them into their first such trip on a North American river or coastal trip. Once they have that first cruise under their belts, they're more likely to travel on future cruises with you, looking back on that first happy experience. And, for those who have led a life that included past cruises, but now in their senior years may be less active or less affluent, a closer-to-home cruise may be just the ticket.

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE

But where can you send them and with which companies? There are a number of opportunities you may wish to explore – many of them are what we often call “small ship cruising.” The first might be Blount Small Ship Cruises (formerly known as American Canadian Caribbean Line). The new name is a tribute to founder Captain Luther Blount, whose daughter now

wears the title of president proudly. The company is known for small, informal, yacht-like cruising on U.S.-registered and U.S.-crewed ships that carry 66-98 passengers. The itineraries are particularly appealing to active, mature travelers. Its founder designed ships with a retractable pilot house to allow for passage under low bridges, and many of its ships feature low ramps in the bow to allow one to walk right off the vessel onto the beach.

The company's unique itineraries include the Erie Canal, a 10-day trip along the East Coast called “Cultures

Hook travelers on a domestic cruise and they'll go farther next time

and Traditions – Charleston to the Chesapeake” and three itineraries on the Mississippi. Also of interest is a New York-to-Toronto trip, cruising the Hudson, St. Lawrence Seaway, Thousand Islands and on to Quebec and Montreal. (blountsmallshipadventures.com)

DIXIELAND AND ALL THAT JAZZ

Another possibility is the Great American Steamboat Company's paddlewheeler, the 436-passenger American Queen. April 2012 is the long-awaited comeback of this, the third “Queen” of the former Delta Queen Steamboat Company. She will ply the Mississippi, Ohio and Tennessee rivers, with special fall foliage cruises slated for September into mid-November and

winter journeys between Memphis and New Orleans. Itineraries range from three to 10 nights. Antebellum decor and showboat-style entertainment will be featured, including Dixieland jazz, swing and Big Band music. (greatamericansteamboatcompany.com)

American Cruise Lines offers trips that emphasize American history and culture. The Queen of the West is running seven-night trips on the Columbia and Snake rivers through Washington and Oregon following in the steps of Lewis and Clark's expedition. Another itinerary, called “New

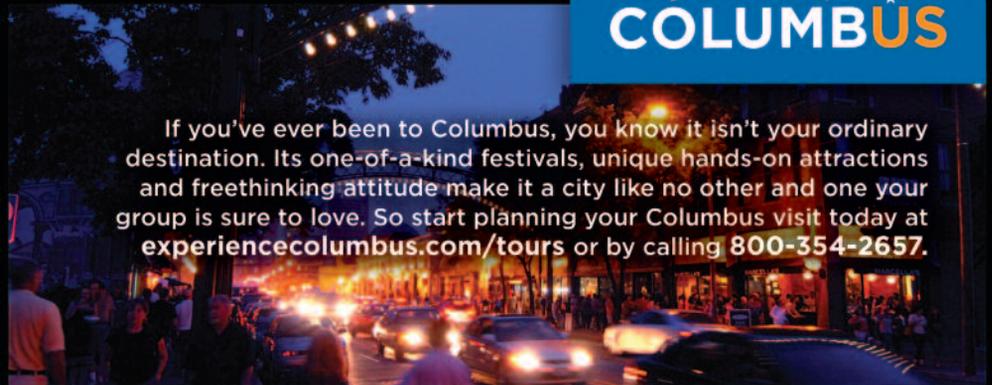
England Islands,” sails out of Providence, R.I. and visits Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard, Newport and more. “Great Rivers of Florida” includes Ocala National Forest, St. Augustine and Amelia Island, ending in Jacksonville. (americancruiselines.com)

Of course, one shouldn't forget our own states of Alaska and Hawaii to round out the mix of endless possibilities right here at home. So whether you select ships big or small, sedate or rollicking good fun, East or West, our country has a panoply of options – right in our own back yard.

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