

## Cruises get on board with a variety of themes

By Fran Golden, Special for USA TODAY

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When travel agency owner Howard Moses launched a website to track theme cruises less than a decade ago he could count the number of such offerings on two hands. Now his one-time pet project, [themecruisefinder.com](http://themecruisefinder.com), lists 400 to 700 cruises at any given time.



By Robb D. Cohen, AP

Passengers on the 2004 Jam Cruise dance while the Dirty Dozen Brass Band plays as the ship leaves Florida.

"The market has grown dramatically, almost exponentially," says Moses, president of The Cruise Authority in Marietta, Ga. "The public wants this unique opportunity to meet and see experts on topics, and share the passion about whatever the subject is."

Theme cruises these days run the gamut from the sublime to the bizarre, focusing on everything from quilting ([quiltcruises.com](http://quiltcruises.com)) to Harleys, from Donny and Marie to jam cruises to heady discussions of evolution.

There are cruises for [Elvis](#) and [Beatles fans](#), foodies, [dancers](#), geeks, sports fanatics, and even those fond of the bloodthirsty — yes, there's a [vampire gathering at sea](#) in the 2012 lineup.

Some of the most popular cruises afford an opportunity for

fans to mingle with stars, and vice versa.

"We want to hang out with you and not sit in our cabins all day," [Kid Rock](#) told an enthusiastic crowd at his **Kid Rock's Chillin' the Most Cruise** last April.

The approach obviously works. The rocker's [third annual Bahamas cruise](#) next April on the 2,642-passenger [Carnival Destiny](#) is sold out. Likewise, a **New Kids on the Block Cruise on the same ship next June** was sold out hours after it was announced this summer. Both have a wait list.

It's no wonder more performers are booking at-sea appearances.

New in 2012, alt band Weezer will appear on **The Weezer Cruise**, [Jan. 19-23](#), on the Carnival Destiny, cruising to the western Caribbean from Miami. The floating music festival will also feature other bands including Dinosaur Jr. and Q&A sessions.

Meanwhile for country fans, the **Blake Shelton Cruise** features the reigning Country Music Award Male Vocalist of the Year appearing on a [weeklong eastern Caribbean cruise](#) on the 2,376-passenger [Norwegian Jewel](#), embarking Miami on Oct. 14.

- **MORE:** [Blake Shelton offers a country-themed Caribbean sailing](#)

While some theme cruises are full-ship charters where everyone on board shares a particular interest, others take the form of large groups with participants invited to private activities (not available to other passengers). In both cases, the cruises may be priced at a premium to cover the extra entertainment/activities.

Cruise lines also organize their own theme sailings with speakers doing sessions open to all passengers.

With a guarantee you'll be traveling with like-minded people, theme cruises are particularly popular with singles, Moses says. Some even offer roommate matching for those looking to share a cabin.

Theme cruises are being added to the docket practically weekly, but here are some additional 2012 highlights:

- [The Osmonds host their first Bahamas cruise](#), **Donny & Marie Cruisin' With Friends**, embarking from [Fort Lauderdale](#) on Feb. 28, on the [MSC Poesia](#). Their siblings will be on board, too.

- **Paula Deen & Family Caribbean Party at Sea** [features the Food Network TV star and her family](#) on the 2,850-passenger [Celebrity Eclipse](#), embarking from Miami on Jan. 21.

- **Vamps at Sea** on Holland America's 1,916-passenger *Zuiderdam* in Alaska's Inside Passage, has such guests as vampire scholar John Edgar Browning and Dacre Stoker, a great-grandnephew of *Dracula* author [Bram Stoker](#). [The weeklong cruise](#) embarks from Vancouver, where *Twilight* movies were filmed, on June 23.

- Three cruises focus on the 100th anniversary of the Titanic sinking in April, with the **Titanic Memorial** sailings [visiting the disaster site in the Atlantic](#). The cruises are on the 694-passenger [Azamara Journey](#) and 1,350-passenger Fred Olsen Cruise Lines *Balmoral*.

- **Hogs on the High Seas** celebrates its [10th motorcycle rally at sea](#), Oct. 28-Nov. 4, on Royal Caribbean's 3,634-passenger *Freedom of the Seas*, cruising the western Caribbean from [Port Canaveral](#). Events include a trade show, tattoo and Topless Hombre contests and many parties. Participants are encouraged to wear leather on formal night.

- Two evergreen favorites are the **Jam Cruise**, [also in its 10th year](#), Jan. 9-14 on the *MSC Poesia*; and **The Smooth Jazz Cruise**, Jan. 15-22 and Jan. 22-29 on the 1,916-passenger *Westerdam*. The Caribbean sailings are all from Fort Lauderdale and feature performances and sessions by a bevy of artists.

- [Scientific American](#) hosts **Bright Horizons 11**, adding brainpower to an eastern Caribbean cruise on [Holland America's 2,104-passenger Eurodam](#), [Jan. 14-21](#), from Fort Lauderdale. Topics to be explored include flower and plant evolution, astrophysics, primatology and physical cosmology, with such sessions as "Plant Sex Made Easy" and "Einstein in a Nutshell."

- **Murder at Sea: Mystery Authors and Mayhem Revealed**, [May 13-20](#), brings best-selling mystery writers onboard the 5,400-passenger [Allure of the Seas](#), cruising the eastern Caribbean from Fort Lauderdale. In addition to socializing with Edgar Award-winning authors, passengers will match wits with other passengers to solve a shipboard whodunit.

- Football fans can go shipboard to mingle with Coach Don Shula and famed fullback Larry Csonka on the **NFL Legends** [transatlantic cruise](#) on the 1,080-passenger *Crystal Serenity* in May, while baseball fans can pick up pointers from former Major League stars including [Vida Blue](#) and Ken Griffey Sr., on a winter series of **Baseball Greats** [Caribbean sailings on the MSC Poesia](#).

- [Nudists can bare all](#) in the Mediterranean on the 227-passenger sailing ship *Royal Clipper*, on a 14-night **Midsummer's Eve Cruise** from Civitavecchia (near Rome), embarking on June 9, with special activities including workshops with relationship advisers.

- Politicians will be espousing their philosophies at sea next year, too. The [National Review](#) and *The Nation* have competing annual sailings (fall dates are not yet announced) themed for [conservatives](#) (Nov. 12-19 on [MS Eurodam](#)) and

[liberals](#) (Dec. 11-18 on [MS Nieuw Amsterdam](#)), respectively. Interestingly, one thing they agree on is the choice of Holland America ships for both cruises.