

# Set for sail

Indians have been going abroad for cruises to holiday in a different way. Seeing this trend, the Indian government has taken various initiatives to develop the Indian cruise industry.

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Pics courtesy: Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd.

Does the song ‘Cruising’ by Gwyneth Paltrow and Huey Lewis remind you of something? Frequent vacationers today are aware of different options to celebrate that ‘special occasion’ or simply have a holiday. Cruising is one such option. Indians are going for cruises as much as other people around the world. However, India itself is not a cruise destination yet.

When asked about the scope of cruises as a vacation option in India, Gautam Chadha, chief executive officer, Tirun Travel Marketing India, said, “The Indian traveller is looking for new and alternate options instead of beach resorts or standard leisure destination hotels. This is evident by the fact that large number of Indians take cruise vacation from ports outside India (Singapore or ports in Europe and North America). Today over 50,000 Indians take cruise vacations abroad annually. The number will multiply manifold if an option is offered from or to an Indian port – the

size of the ship and types of itinerary will determine the number of cruisers.” Tirun Travel Marketing India represents three brands owned by Royal Caribbean Cruises – Royal Caribbean International, Celebrity Cruises and Azmara Cruises, and Silversea Cruises.

The situation is set for a change. India, with its 7500 km long coastline and numerous ports, will soon, for the first time ever, have a National Cruise Shipping Policy to promote cruise tourism. This policy has been approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs and is now pending official notification. Early indications on the policy suggest that the government will rationalise the levy of taxes and fees charged by multiple agencies, encourage development of ports and related infrastructure along the coast line and address the cabotage laws in existence. The Government has identified six Indian ports to be developed as world class cruise terminals and to be promoted as an integrated Indian cruise

circuit. These are Mumbai, Goa, Kochi, New Mangalore, Tuticorin and Chennai. After this, the government will open up avenues for the Indian industry to provide marine and hospitality services together with shore side related activities like excursions or sight-seeing tours, shopping, sea sports, and so on.

Currently, no cruise ship sails out of India, that is, passengers do not have the option of boarding a cruise ship from India and going on a cruise vacation. However, quite a few international cruise lines call at Indian ports, mainly, Mumbai, Goa and Kochi. The guests onboard these cruise ships have the option to go ashore and undertake shore excursions before returning to the cruise



ship for their onward journey. These cruise ships cannot pick up passengers while in India.

Chadha reckons Mumbai as the future of cruise industry in India. He says, "Ideally Mumbai will emerge as the hub for cruise ships in India. The coastline has a head start in terms of facilities, which need to be upgraded, and a seemingly interested port authority which has seen the business opportunity in developing a cruise terminal. Also and very importantly, Mumbai is a major source market itself for any cruise line and geography certainly matters in generating the required number of guests and revenue."

With regard to the Indians, today, in order to take a cruise vacation, the Indian holidayer needs to fly to the relevant port of embarkation and then board the cruise ship. Popular ports of embarkation are, Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai in Asia, Barcelona, Vienna, Rome and Amsterdam in Europe, ports in the U.K., and, Miami, Orlando, Los Angeles, New York and Vancouver in North America. Tirun Travel Marketing and partner Royal Caribbean Cruises have seen the numbers of Indians going on its cruises increase exponentially. The first six months of 2008 have seen the numbers equal the figures for all of 2007. Cruise is the fastest growing segment of vacation travel in India and abroad. While there are no plans to promote India as a cruise destination till now, the announcement of the policy might turn around things.

While, according to Chadha, it will take 12 to 15 months for an India-based

cruise ship to set sail (subject to the time when policy is announced and its contents), vacationers can take advantage of the various cruise options offered in the other countries. Routes from Goa to Lakshwadeep are in the pipeline.

Some unique cruise destinations that you can enjoy are Africa, Alaska, Antarctica, Australia, Bahamas, Bermuda and Hawaii. Some leading cruises which have routes to almost every cruise destination are Azmara Cruises, Celebrity Cruises, Carnival Cruise Lines, Crystal Cruises, Cunard Line, Holland America Line, Norwegian Cruise Line, Princess Cruises, Regent Seven Seas, Royal Caribbean, Seabourn Cruise Line, Silversea Cruises and Windstar Cruises.

You can find cruises to suit your budget. Usually, cruise fare includes accommodation, on board activities, meals, and transportation from port to port. So you will know how much a cruise vacation will cost you beforehand. Cruises offer dancing, live entertainment,

nightclubs, lounges, feature films, and parties to keep you delightfully occupied. Many of them also have live shows to keep you entertained. So if you are waiting for an Indian cruise, you don't have to wait much. ■

