



The newest "WAVE" in event planning

Summer is in full swing, and with it comes the delightful onslaught of poolside parties and backyard barbecues. But if you're looking for a fresh scene for mid-summer shindigs, events on and along the water present a great alternative.

photos courtesy: Devine & Powers Communication Group LLC

The newest "wave" in event planning is relaxing dockside gatherings and sailing adventures that set the stage for crowd-pleasing parties with on-site entertainment, food and décor, underscored by amazing sightseeing.

Entertainment Cruises, the largest dining and entertainment cruise company in the United States, has a fleet of 23 ships in eight port cities - Baltimore; Boston; Chicago; Norfolk; Philadelphia; New York; Washington, DC; and Weehawken, NJ, serving 1.5 million guests annually with their Spirit Cruises, Odyssey Cruises and Baltimore Harbor Cruises brands.

Entertainment Cruises' vessels are some of the most in-demand venues for onboard celebrations up and down the Atlantic Coast, as well as in the Chicago area, from birthday bashes and graduation parties to Fourth of July festivities and family reunions. These ships are set to sail with groups ranging from 30 to 600 people, providing guests with a chance to try out their sea legs as they sail away for two-to-three hours of relaxation and celebration.

Another famous port city, Newport, RI, has a new waterfront destination and event space to add to the map. Opening July 4 and located in the heart of Newport on Thames Street, Forty 1' North features 9,000 square feet of outdoor waterfront dining with a covered open-air pavilion on a fixed pier directly over the water, and a variety of dining and lounge seating options. Because the property is also home to a state-of-the-art marina with dockage for yachts up to 250 feet, guests can literally arrive by water for social gatherings, receptions, corporate meetings and parties for up to 350 people.

Spirit of Philadelphia



On or near the water, scenery stands out as one of the strongest perks to hosting waterside events.

"Cruising on a ship is a great way to experience the architecture and history of a city," said Bob Gregory, general manager of the Spirit of Philadelphia. "From the water you can see a city's landmarks from a different and unique vantage point - the perfect touch if you have out-of-town guests at your event. In a city like Philadelphia, the waterfront skyline really is its signature, and cruises on the Spirit of Philadelphia offer a wonderful and special way to enjoy these views."

Spirit Cruises treats guests to ever-changing cityscapes and aquatic history lessons. Tour Penn's Landing on the Delaware Riverfront with spectacular views of the Ben Franklin Bridge and the Philadelphia and Camden skylines aboard the Spirit of Philadelphia; sail along the Hudson River, and set your sights on the Empire State Building, the Brooklyn Bridge, and the Statue of Liberty on Spirit of New Jersey, Spirit of New York and Bateaux New York ships; or cruise down the Elizabeth River, by Tanner's Point and the Monitor/Merrimac battle site aboard the Spirit of Norfolk.

Both Spirit of Washington and Odyssey Cruises include tours of Washington, DC monuments such as the Jefferson and Lincoln memorials. Baltimore Harbor Cruises offers an unmatched panoramic view of the historic Baltimore harbor.

"Baltimore is a city known for its waterfront," noted Tom D'Amato, vice president of restaurant operations/development for Entertainment Cruises, and the driving force behind Baltimore Harbor Cruises. "Groups looking for an activity characteristic of this destination are drawn to Baltimore Harbor Cruises, and quickly find that the harbor is a key part of the community here."

Further north, Odyssey and Spirit of Boston treat guests to waterfront views of the Charlestown Naval Yard along Boston Harbor. And to the west, both the Spirit of Chicago and Odyssey Cruises

provide views of the Sears Tower and the Navy Pier on the Chicago Lakefront and along Lake Michigan.

Part marina, part resort, Forty 1' North's extensive waterfront space provides a panorama of the Newport Harbor, offering distinct impressions of seaside life in Newport, both past and present. On one side you can witness the working waterfront in the form of an active fishing pier with rustic lobster boats; on the other are some of the most ultra-modern, multi-million dollar mega-yachts, fresh in from the Caribbean.

Across the Harbor is Fort Adams, dating back to Colonial days, and in the distance is the mouth of the harbor with vessels of all kind coming and going. The view is a combined snapshot of the history and future of Newport's Harbor.

"As much as we locals might take it for granted, many people rarely have the chance to spend time on the water," observed Leslie Streuli, events coordinator for Forty 1' North. "Generally, people associate water access with vacation or time off, so events on the water are a great way to stir up pleasant connotations of fun, family and friends."

While sightseeing is a definite highlight of the cruise experience, there is as much entertainment that goes on onboard as offshore. Music and dancing get guests on their feet and in the mood for fun, with a run of several dance floors and staging areas. The Spirit Cruises fleet offers a live musical review, as well as a DJ, while Odyssey provides a bring-your-own-band option for a completely customized celebration.

"People like planning events on our ship because it's simple and stress-free," said Sal Naso, vice president and general manager, Entertainment Cruises Washington, DC. "We're the perfect solution if you're planning an event, especially for those on a tight timeframe."

A one-stop shop for food, décor and entertainment, event coordinators will cruise through the party planning

CROWD CONTROL

Businesses, schools and universities have latched on to the idea of hosting events on the water, in large part because they ensure a captive audience. For events tailored to younger guests - take high school students at prom, for example - cruises keep the kids on board and in sight through the duration of the event. The same principle applies to corporate functions: cruises guarantee the room stays full until the event is finished.

When it comes to cocktail parties or holiday gatherings where alcohol is involved, ship settings come into play as a safety measure. Since guests are not able to leave the ship until it docks, event organizers have control of how much time passes between "last call" and actually disembarking the ship. Planners of events on land cannot prevent intoxicated guests from leaving a party to drive home; however planners of events at sea can impose a "dry" hour at the end of the evening to allowing guests time to sober up before the ship docks.

process onboard. These flexible event spaces can be scheduled in the afternoon, evening or late at night. Book a lunch cruise, early dinner cruise, dinner dance cruise or moonlight cruise. Rain or shine, guests are set for celebration.

When the weather is nice, outdoor strolling decks and full outdoor patio decks give cruisers a closer look at the scenery. On the hottest days or during a summer shower, climate-controlled dining and entertainment decks with huge panoramic windows offer guests a breathtaking view of the waterfront and city skylines.

As if summer is not reason enough to celebrate the great outdoors, the Spirit, Odyssey and Baltimore Harbor fleets offer themed cruises tied into holidays and special events. David Johnson, sales and marketing coordinator for the Odyssey ship in Washington DC, noted the popular appeal of specialty cruises, including Odyssey's Fourth of July fireworks cruise, a Cherry Blossom Cruise, and a sunset cruise series, in addition to holiday sailings.

For corporate events, the Spirit of Philadelphia recently launched a two-hour "Business Cocktails" cruise. Shorter than the usual three-hour cruise, but twice as long as the standard happy hour, this cruise pairs tasty cocktail selections and city scenery for an extraordinary weekday event.

"This cruise evolved from event planners' expressed desire for a refreshing, after-work event venue that switched up the scenery from hotels and restaurants, but was still easily accessible," said Gregory. "So we came up with this shorter version of our regular cruise to fit neatly into the corporate timeframe and still give guests a taste of the cruise experience."

"Whether you're entertaining clients or hosting family and friends this summer, waterside events are the perfect way to change up the scenery and offer guests a relaxing retreat," Streuli added.

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