



CRUISING FOR CULTURE

Cultural tourism offers a great resource for Great Lakes cruise industry

A revolution has been taking place in the tourism industry and, similar to most revolutions, even if you are not part of the movement, you need to know about it. This revolution is worldwide, and over the past 20 years, has been rapidly segmenting tourism into a far more interesting industry. In many respects, we are living in the Golden Age of tourism, with a vast array of travel opportunities and a wide selection of experts catering to our every whim.

Years ago we referred to this industry as the "Holiday Business" and our customers were "Holiday Makers," happily and passively wandering across the landscape, gazing through the window as the scenery passed by. What a change, and what a revolution this industry has experienced, driven by the availability of information on the Web, by specialist television programs and those magnificent *National Geographic* magazine images and articles.

We now have an amazing variety of segmented travel opportunities, including Eco Tourism, Adventure Tourism, Sports Tourism, Singles Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Volunteer-Tourism and the phenomenal growth of Cruise Tourism. Tourism has been benefiting from the fusion of enterprising minds, the growth of disposable income, the explosion of communications and the trend towards segmentation.

Never before have we enjoyed such an extraordinary variety of creative, well-researched vacations catering to every conceivable passion. Two of the most fascinating and powerful segments of this industry, Cultural Tourism and Cruise Tourism, can take this creativity to another level.

Cultural Tourism is motivated by an interest in other people, other places and other cultures. Typically, it focuses on museums and art galleries, arts events, cultural festivals, historic sites and heritage attractions, architecture, local customs and cuisine, indigenous peoples and their cultures. Each culture is unique and may vary

from region to region.

Think about it—if we were discussing Pittsburgh, we could not do so without considering how the steel industry shaped Pittsburgh's society. If we were discussing Atlantic Canada or New England, we could not discuss these places without considering how the sea has shaped their unique maritime culture. If we were discussing the state of Michigan, we could not do so without discussing this fascinating water-bound state's maritime history. The culture of every region has unique and differentiating features and, accordingly, unique opportunities for cultural tourism.

So just who are these cultural tourists? Well, they tend to belong to mature age cohorts, i.e.: baby boomers and the 55+ market. They tend to be more highly educated and a large number are university graduates. They tend to be managers or professionals, take longer trips and (drum roll for \$\$\$) spend about 50 percent more than any other segment.

In 2000, 65 percent of the entire U.S. population (92.7 million) included a cultural element into their travel plans. Sixty-one million people visited a historic site or re-enactment, 42 million visited a museum, 32 million saw live theater and 30 million spent time in an art gallery. These represent millions of dollars for the cultural sector and even more for support sectors of the tourism industry.

And so on to Great Lakes Cruising on the world's last little-cruised bodies of water where cultural tourism can play a huge part in the growth of this industry. Those of us who work in the Great Lakes Cruise business can attest to the popularity of what we call "Enrichment Cruising"—cruising with a series of lecturers on-board, returning home with an enriched knowledge of where we have travelled. Swan Hellenic, based in the U.K., has been one of the world leaders in this field and The Great Lakes Cruise Company, based in Ann Arbor, Michigan, have achieved similar successes. From here, it is short distance to

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the emergence of cultural tourism as a major element in the planning of the cruise industry.

In many ways this is a natural path for Great Lakes cruising to navigate. The Great Lakes offers many superb opportunities for cultural cruises on both the U.S. and Canadian side of the border. Renaissance cities such as Chicago, Toronto and Detroit possess world-class cultural institutions while Duluth, Cleveland and Toledo have sharply defined cultures of their own. Intimate ports-of-call such as Erie, Goderich, Little Current, Port Huron and Parry Sound offer cruisers their own distinct heritage and arts traditions.

The Great Lakes has a variety of expansive wilderness coastlines, an abundance of wildlife, vibrant indigenous cultures, multi-ethnic traditions, festivals and artisans, along with great heritage attractions from one end to the other. Michigan has superb maritime history and Ontario has the celebrated Legacy Coast and surprising Georgian Bay.

Cultural Tourism and Cruising on the Great Lakes is a great marriage just waiting to happen. ■

Stephen Burnett's career includes a strong background in the cruising industry in Switzerland, New York and Canada. He is formerly Vice-President of Product Development for Jonview Canada and recently co-authored a product development process entitled "The Development of the Cultural Corridor."

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