



Reduce, Recycle, Eliminate: How Cruise Lines are Reducing Plastic Waste

By Aaron Saunders

Cruise lines are continually finding new and exciting ways to innovate and improve the guest experience, from cutting-edge entertainment to world-class dining options. Exciting innovations are also taking place below deck. When it comes to plastic recycling, the industry is leading the way, with cruise lines focused on new ways to reduce, recycle, or eliminate plastic waste.

Reducing Plastic

The first line of defense is reducing plastic use entirely. Many Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) members, for instance, have switched to individual aluminum or paper bottled water containers onboard, banning plastic bottles for sale. Many cruise lines also now offer filtered water filling stations that allow guests to use personal reusable bottles onboard, and some lines provide take-home reusable bottles as a guest amenity.

In terms of single-use plastics cruise lines are reducing everything from plastic straws to plastic used for shipping food and other goods to the ships. The impact of this is huge: Carnival Corporation, with its eight brands has eliminated more than 500 million individual plastic items.

Royal Caribbean aimed to achieve an 80% reduction in single-use plastics by the end of 2025. This includes replacing drink stirrers and toothpicks with sustainable versions made from wood or bamboo.

CLIA member cruise lines' commitment to reducing plastic doesn't just end within the hull of the ship: Cruise lines such as Holland America Line, MSC and Princess Cruises routinely participate in beach and shoreside cleanups in the ports of call they visit.

On its private Bahamas island, Perfect Day at CocoCay, Royal Caribbean committed to reducing plastic waste, along with all other waste – efforts which have already seen a 50% reduction in waste barge shipments to nearby Nassau.

Recycling Plastic and Other Materials

Cruise lines have also ramped up their efforts to recycle the plastics that do make it onboard – with innovative results.

Holland America Line debuted an exciting new item in its onboard gift shops: Coffee coasters made with scraps of old carpeting taken off its ships during drydock. The new carpets that were laid down were, too, made using recycled products, including recycled plastic debris.

Disney Cruise Line found a use for recycled plastic in its musical production of “The Little Mermaid,” on Disney Wish, with costumes made with recycled plastic, melted into threads, and woven into material.

Norwegian Cruise Line recycles its old mooring lines thanks to a partnership with Vancouver, Canada-based TYMAC, which transforms the lines into items like soap dishes and planters.

Eliminate – and Power

Below-the-waterline, advanced climate technology is enabling cruise lines to reduce plastic and other waste, while also generating auxiliary power.

The latest Princess Cruises ships, for instance, are outfitted with Micro Auto Gasification Systems (MAGS) that ingest and burn waste to create a syngas that can be used for low-emission energy.

Microwave-Assisted Pyrolysis, or MAP, systems – as implemented on new ships by Royal Caribbean – convert waste into clean energy by using microwave technology.

With policies and cutting-edge technology, CLIA cruise lines are leading the way, recycling, reducing, and eliminating plastic waste.

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