



The New Wave of Cruisers: How Millennials and Gen Z Are Redefining Cruise Culture

When it comes to young travelers, cruise vacations are all about the adventure, connection to culture, food, and most importantly, being able to capture and share experiences online. If you need any proof of that, just check out hashtags like #CruiseTok and #CruiseLife on TikTok and Instagram. Those two hashtags have collectively amassed hundreds of millions of views, offering a front row seat to the next generation of cruisers.

Young travelers, especially those aged 21 to 39, are seeing those social media videos and responding with an eager curiosity for cruises. Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) reports that Millennials (22%) and Gen Z (14%) now make up roughly 36% of all cruise passengers. Jason Liberty, president and CEO of Royal Caribbean Group, says about half of Royal Caribbean's guests are now Millennials or younger (including those under age 20). Among Millennials, 83% who have cruised before plan to cruise again, topped only by Gen-X (84%), according to CLIA's 2025 State of the Cruise Industry Report.

Who are young cruisers and what makes them tick?

Emerging 21- to 39-year-old cruisers are digital natives, on the hunt for experience-driven travel that is socially connected. They value authenticity over luxury, prefer shorter length trips, and seek more affordable, top-value getaways.

Many in this group took their first cruise with their parents as children or teens and have fond memories of their family vacations. Now, as working adults or young parents themselves, they're returning to the sea—this time with their own kids, partners, or friends in tow.

“These guests are doing their homework; they're exploring social media, reading reviews, and leaning into peer recommendations before they ever hit 'book now,’” says Stephen Hopkins, Vice President of Growth at adults-only Virgin Voyages. “They want flexibility, unexpected moments, and experiences that match their lifestyle, whether that's a sunrise yoga class, dinner at a Michelin-inspired eatery, or dancing until dawn under the stars. They're rethinking what a cruise can be.”

What do they love most?

Like other travelers, Millennials and Gen Z, including young professionals and young families, appreciate that cruise fares match many budgets, and there are a variety of itineraries that

easily fit into work and school calendars. They also appreciate the value of cruise fares – which cover accommodations, entertainment, activities, and culinary options.

Modern ships bring elevated travel experiences, combining cuisine by top chefs, Broadway-caliber entertainment, exciting amusement attractions, and resort-style ease. They are also easy to book – whether DIY or through an experienced travel agent. Young travelers appreciate they can hop aboard, unpack once, and wake up in a new destination.

How are cruise lines responding?

Cruise lines have taken note of the surge in demand by younger travelers and have responded with fresh, innovative offerings. These include:

More shorter cruises: Cruise lines are aware younger generations may be short on PTO. Many cruise lines have 3- to 5-night itineraries that pack in visits to tropical destinations, beach days, nightlife, and onboard fun – perfect for a long weekend or quick getaway.

Beach club vibes: DJs and party flair fuel the late-night vibe onboard ships and at cruise line-owned destinations. Royal Caribbean's Hideaway Beach is an adults-only beach club with a poolside DJ spinning lively beats, located at the line's private Bahamas island, Perfect Day at CocoCay. Carnival Cruise Line boasts a massive swim-up bar with DJ at its adults-only Calypso Lagoon at the new Celebration Key on Grand Bahama Island. Both destinations also have extensive facilities for young families.

Solo travelers: Many cruise lines, including Royal Caribbean, Celebrity Cruises, MSC Cruises, and Norwegian Cruise Line now offer solo cabins designed for one person, eliminating the need for single supplement fees. Sailing solo is more popular than ever, and cruise lines now host numerous gatherings and events to help solo travelers connect. These include cocktail hours, wine tastings, and group dinners. Select Norwegian Cruise Line ships also have a solo lounge, an exclusive socializing hub for those booking solo Studio cabins.

Millennials and Gen Z travelers are influencing the ships of the future, with cruise lines not only meeting their needs but also learning from them.

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