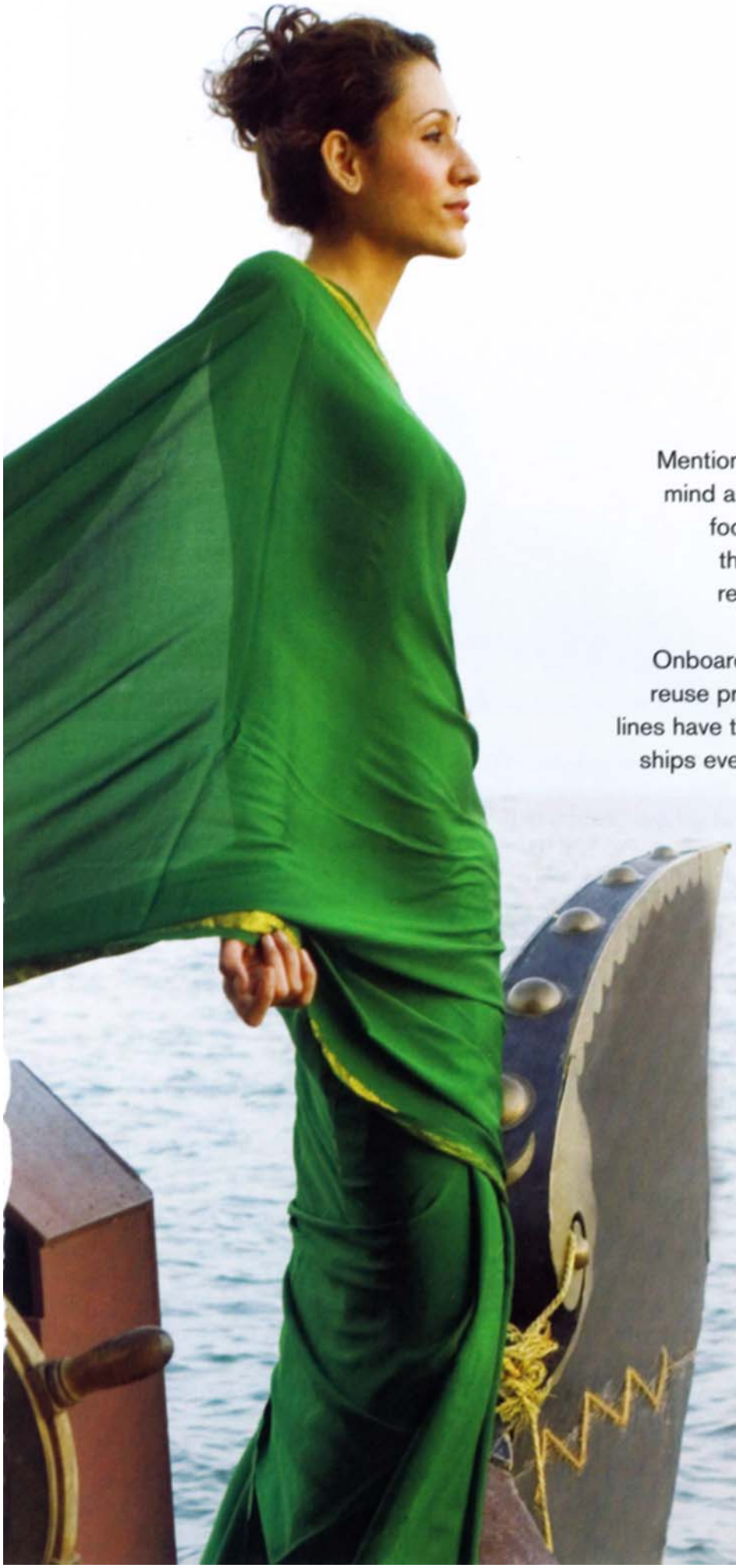
Cruising Toward a Greener Future

By Jodi Helmer

Cruise lines and their passengers strive to be more environmentally friendly.



Mention cruises and the first things that come to mind are exotic ports, luxury ships, and gourmet food. But among travelers concerned about the environment, cruises are also gaining a reputation as eco-friendly vacation options.

Onboard recycling programs and towel and linen reuse programs are just a few of the steps cruise lines have taken to become more eco-friendly. Some ships even plug into green electricity while in port.

The changes are due, in part, to a growing demand from passengers: According to a survey conducted by Orbitz, 67 percent of travelers place importance on the eco-friendliness of their vacations. "The ocean is the lifeblood of our business," says Captain William J. Morani Jr., vice president of environmental management systems for Holland America Line. "It is where we work and our guests play, and we're committed to leaving it just as we found it."

Covering the Basics

Many cruise lines such as Holland America, Carnival Cruise Lines, and Royal Caribbean International make use of available programs to preserve the environment. All of the paper, glass, aluminum, and plastic used on board is recycled. In ports where facilities exist, batteries, florescent light bulbs, and toner cartridges are also recycled.

Efforts are also made to conserve resources and use eco-friendly products whenever possible. Carnival has installed energy-efficient air conditioning systems in the staterooms on most of its ships; Holland America prints its brochures on paper with recycled content; and Royal Caribbean has stopped supplying disposable plastic items like plastic plates and flatware to passengers.

Both Carnival and Holland America have installed eco-friendly dry-cleaning systems on board as well, eliminating outdated systems that relied on harsh solvents to clean clothes. Holland America has also replaced all of the X-ray machines in its onboard dental offices with digital models to reduce the use of harmful chemicals.

DOING YOUR PART

Passengers play a huge role in protecting the environment. Here are a few suggestions for making your cruise more eco-friendly:

✓Purchase carbon offsets for the flights to and from the embarkation/debarkation ports. Companies such as Carbon Neutral Company, Climate Care, and NativeEnergy all provide programs to offset carbon emissions.
✓Pack phosphorous-free soaps and shampoos to keep harmful residues from reaching the ocean.
✓Take part in onboard recycling programs.
✓Choose shore excursions that have a limited impact on the environment. For example, instead of renting a jet ski, go snorkeling.
✓Turn off the lights before leaving your stateroom and keep stateroom doors closed while the air-conditioning is on.
✓Conserve water by taking shorter showers and turning off the water while brushing your teeth.
— *J.H.*

Ecoventura

Ecoventura offers carbon-neutral cruises to the Galapagos.

"These initiatives are all part of our day-to-day operations," says Elaine Heldewier, environmental director for Carnival. "The environment is important to us and is the basis of many of the decisions that we make."

One of the basic principles of being environmentally friendly is doing no harm to wildlife. Holland America recognized the impact cruise ships can have on marine life and launched Avoiding Whale Strikes, a program to reduce the likelihood of collisions between ships and whales, which is one of the biggest threats to the mammals. The efforts earned the cruise line a Conservation Partnership Award from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Going the Extra Mile

Cruise ships have long been the target of criticism for their negative impact on the environment. Huge diesel engines propel the ships and release pollutants into the air, and bilge water is often released into the ocean impacting marine life. A growing commitment to addressing these issues has led cruise lines to research ways to minimize their environmental impact.

The cruise industry as a whole is looking at the possibility of using alternative fuels, and several cruise lines, including Holland America, are using biodegradable oil whenever possible. Carnival recently joined with the International SeaKeepers Society to help scientists monitor ocean water quality. To aid in scientific research, a data-gathering device was installed on *Carnival Triumph* to assess the impact of ocean pollution, global climate change, and weather patterns.

A small number of cruise operators have taken their commitment to the environment one step further. Ecoventura, REI Adventures, and Jam Cruise offer carbon-neutral cruises. The promise: Enough trees will be planted to absorb the greenhouse gas emissions from a cruise.

Ecoventura, an Ecuadorian company with 20 vessels that cruise to the Galapagos Islands, began offering carbon-neutral cruises in 2006. Last year, the company offset more than 4,000 tons of carbon emissions — all at no cost to its passengers.

"We consider it part of the cost of doing business," explains Doris Welch, director of sales and marketing for Ecoventura. "It started off as a way for us to reduce the environmental impact of our operation, but it has grown into an important component of our company identity."

All of the dinghies that Ecoventura uses for its shore excursions have four-stroke engines, which are quieter, emit fewer fumes, and are more fuel-efficient than two-stroke engines. The company also uses biodegradable cleaning products on board and purchases 27 percent of its food supplies from local vendors.

"It all boils down to what we can do to preserve the environment and local wildlife," says Welch. "Our commitment to the environment has been well-received among our passengers; a lot of them choose Ecoventura over other cruise lines because we're eco-friendly."

Passenger Participation

Passengers are encouraged to do their part to protect the environment. Towel reuse programs have been implemented, recycling is encouraged, and environmental preservation — such as not breaking off pieces of coral or slathering on sunscreen before snorkeling — is emphasized prior to shore excursions.

In addition, environmental officers are stationed on most cruise ships. Their primary role is ensuring that the ships are following all environmental regulations. The officers are also a resource for passengers who have questions about the relationship between the cruise ship and the environment.

Other innovative onboard programs have been introduced to educate passengers. Several of the Camp Carnival activities for kids emphasize the environment and educational cartoons are broadcast on in-cabin televisions. In all staterooms on Holland America ships, a DVD provides a behind-the-scenes look at what is being done on board to reduce, reuse, and recycle. It also offers suggestions for passengers to help make their cruise more eco-friendly such as turning off lights before they leave their staterooms and participating in the towel reuse program.

The Future of Green Cruising

There is no question that cruises are much more environmentally friendly than in decades past. Still, cruise lines recognize there is still work to be done. Carnival is in the midst of testing different mechanical components to decrease emissions and researching options to reduce the trim of the ship in order to reduce fuel consumption.

In 2007, Holland America launched a pilot program to reduce emissions. The $1.5 million system was installed on *Zaandam*. It uses sea water to "scrub" smokestack emissions, which should remove almost all of the sulfur dioxide and a significant portion of particulate matter before it is released into the air. Government agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency and Environment Canada are advising or supporting the project.

"It is a work in progress, but the preliminary results are very positive," says Morani. "Innovations like these are costly, but are also a worthwhile investment in the environment." ■

SHADES OF GREEN

Cruise lines across the entire industry are doing their part for Ma Earth. Here are just a few of the initiatives and proactive steps these lines have recently taken.

Costa Cruises
Even after being the first cruise line whose entire fleet earned a Green Star notation by the Royal Institution of Naval Architects in 2005, Costa continues its eco-friendliness with an Environmental Compliance department, a dedicated environmental officer on each ship, and their support of the World Wildlife Fund in some of the most endangered marine regions.

Cunard Line
Cunard's environmental officer will often appear on their morning TV show to discuss and explain the company's efforts. Additionally, Cunard only gets its seafood from sustainable sources.

Disney Cruise Line
With unique energy- and water-saving efforts, Disney makes the most of the natural resources all around it. *Disney Wonder* was the first cruise ship to utilize a new, nontoxic hull coating that reduces surface resistance in the water and increases fuel efficiency.

Norwegian Cruise Line
NCL tries to green 'em young, with programs to teach children and teenagers the importance of clean water. High-school students can even earn community service hours for their participation in the program.

Regent Seven Seas Cruises
In addition to its stance against visiting areas that hold dolphins in captivity, Regent also works extensively with Ocean Futures Society, Jean Michel Cousteau's conservation and marine life enrichment program.
— *P.C.*

Jean-Michel Cousteau scuba diving

Tom Ordway/Ocean Futures Society