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Abstract

Cruise vacations have become increasingly popular in the recent past. This is due to the exceptional experiences they grant travelers and the outstanding services such as luxury, convenience, and comfort. The industry is dominated by three major cruise lines, Royal Caribbean, Carnival, and Norwegian, mainly because strong entry barriers and promising marketing conditions characterize the sector. They all offer special services and experiences that cater to the preferences and needs of travelers. This research paper analyzes and contrasts these three main cruise companies based on their history, itinerary, onboard activities, and customer service. The research utilizes primary and secondary resources to conduct a qualitative comparative analysis of the three cruise lines. The comparison in this essay sheds light on each cruise company's advantages and disadvantages, assisting potential passengers in making well-informed decisions when selecting a cruise line.

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Introduction

Cruise lines have witnessed substantial growth and development in the hospitality sector for the last few decades. The cruise sector comprises only a fraction of the tourism and hospitality sectors. However, the per capita expenses of the cruise passengers amount to more than double the total expenditure of the general tourists. Cruise vacations have become popular mainly due to convenience, luxury, and comfort. These high growth rates and substantial consumer spending indicate the high market potential of different cruise lines. As of 2019, the average growth rate was approximately 4.5%, with the number of passengers projected to expand to 25 million. Strong entry barriers and promising marketing conditions characterize the sector. As a result, three major cruise lines dominate the sector: Royal Caribbean Ltd (RCL), Carnival Corporation & plc (CCL), and Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL). All three cruise lines offer unique experiences to cater to travelers' varying preferences and needs. The main objective of this research paper is to compare and contrast the three main cruise lines while providing an in-depth insight into some of the strengths and weaknesses of the cruise lines. This research paper will help potential travelers make an informed decision when choosing a cruise line for a vacation.

Literature Review

Academic literature has extensively studied different cruise lines and the cruise industry. Several studies and past research have compared and contrasted various cruise lines using different criteria. Chang et al. (2019) researched major cruise lines' efficiency, including RCL, CCL, and NCL. The research paper examined how the three companies operate, why some dominant cruise lines are more efficient than others, and the significant determinants for efficiency. Rahman also studied customer satisfaction and service quality in the cruise industry.

Mayntz (2021) also conducted research on the various cruise lines that are dominant in the cruise industry. The author analyzes several cruise lines and includes video clips of passenger experiences granted to travelers on different cruise lines. First, the Royal Caribbean is a multinational cruise line that started in 1969 and now runs 26 ships. The corporation's fleet includes the Oasis-class ships, which rank among the biggest cruise ships in the world and are noted for their ingenuity. The cruise company provides itineraries on adventure and active excursions to the Caribbean, Europe, Asia, and Australia. Rock climbing, zip line, surfing, and skydiving simulators are among the activities available on board, in addition to musical performances and Broadway-style musicals. Royal Caribbean ships have several dining options, from informal buffets to upscale dining establishments, and some ships have celebrity chef relationships.

Another leading cruise company is Carnival, established in 1972 and today employs 24 ships. The cruise line is well-known for its "Fun Ships," which have a relaxed and vibrant 7ambiance and are geared at providing cheap family holidays. The cruise line offers enjoyable and entertaining itineraries to the Caribbean, Mexico, Alaska, and Europe (Mayntz, 2021). Along with various food options, including casual eateries and specialist restaurants, onboard entertainment options include comedy performances, minigolf, water parks, and arcade games. Norwegian Cruise Line presently sails 17 ships and is relatively the youngest cruise line on the planet. The cruise company is well-known for its "Freestyle Cruising" approach, which lets guests eat and participate in activities on their timetables without allocated seats or dress standards. The cruise company provides itineraries focusing on flexibility and freedom to places including the Caribbean, Europe, and Alaska, among other captivating worldwide destinations. Along with various food options, including specialist restaurants and freestyle dining locations,

onboard entertainment options include water parks, ropes courses, and Broadway-style plays. The company's ships are all designed to ensure the passengers get the choices and opportunities they want in the cruise experience.

Based on the previous research that has been conducted, there is a research gap that this research paper will fill. As noted from several studies conducted in the recent past, there are very few articles that provide a comparison of different cruise lines. Many of the research papers the researcher came across were mainly concerned with the efficiency of the cruise lines in delivering their services. Others provided only an analysis of the dominant cruise lines and the services they offer. As for this research paper, the researcher seeks to provide readers with an in-depth comparison of three major cruise lines to help travelers decide on the cruise line they would like to vacation with. It will also help the companies understand their strengths and areas that require improvement.

Methodology

The research paper followed a qualitative analysis approach to provide a comparison between the three main cruise lines under discussion. The comparative analysis will specifically focus on major aspects of the cruise lines, including their history, onboard activities, fleet, dining, itineraries, and customer service. The data for this research paper was obtained from various primary and secondary sources. Some of these sources include scholarly articles and academic literature related to various cruise lines and the cruise industry in general, official websites of RCL, NCL, and CCL, annual reports provided by the cruise lines, and customer reviews regarding the three cruise lines.

The credibility and reliability of the selected reference materials were based on how recently the source was published, a clear indication of the sources of information and authors of

an article. The reference materials were also confirmed to be free from bias, and the facts provided were backed up with supporting evidence. Only articles from trustworthy organizations were chosen. Peer reviews and scholarly journal articles were prioritized as they were considered more credible and reliable than articles from trade or popular journals such as magazines. The researcher was able to analyze by identifying the special features of one cruise in a particular category and comparing them with the other two lines. The comparison will help the researcher identify a cruise line's strengths or weaknesses based on the acquired information.

Findings

The research discovered information regarding the three cruise lines based on different aspects. Some elements considered when composing this comparison include the history of the cruise lines, the number of fleets a company owns, the itineraries offered, onboard activities provided by each cruise line, dining options available for travelers, and the customer services quality. The following is an extensive discussion of the comparative analysis findings based on the abovementioned elements.

History of the Cruise Lines

Norwegian Cruise Lines, Carnival, and Royal Caribbean have distinctive histories and origins influencing their brands and identities. While each of the three companies places a strong emphasis on fun and entertainment, Norwegian is known for its individualized service and flexible dining options, while Royal Caribbean is renowned for its casually relaxed and high-energy vibe, and Carnival is recognized for its casual fun (Mayntz, 2021).

Royal Caribbean was created in 1969 by a collection of Norwegian shipping firms that intended to develop a new cruise experience that blended luxury lodgings with onboard activities and entertainment (Kerliev & Krieger, 2019). The Song of Norway, the company's first ship,

sailed in 1970. Royal Caribbean soon gained a reputation for its cutting-edge ships, featuring amenities like rock-climbing walls, ice rinks, and surf simulators (Cruise experts, n.d.). Royal Caribbean now runs 26 ships and is renowned for its vibrant, welcoming atmosphere.

Ted Arison, who had before served as an employee of Norwegian Cruise Lines, founded Carnival Cruise Line in 1972. Arison aimed to develop a more accessible cruise experience that was more reasonably priced. Carnival soon gained notoriety for its joyful and celebratory ambiance, which included live music, casinos, and various food options, after the company's first ship, the Mardi Gras, sailed in 1972 (Chang et al., 2019). Carnival now has 24 ships and is well-recognized for emphasizing informal pleasure.

Norwegian Cruise Line was created in 1966 by Knut Kloster and Ted Arison (who subsequently formed Carnival Cruise Line). For similar reasons to Royal Caribbean, Norwegian was founded to provide a more lavish and advanced cruise experience, emphasizing individualized service and distinctive itineraries. The Sunward, the company's first ship, sailed in 1966, and during the 1970s and 1980s, it expanded by launching new ships and adding features like private balconies and freestyle dining. Currently operating 17 ships, Norwegian is renowned for its flexible dining options and casual, free-spirited attitude.

Itineraries

Each of the three cruise companies offers a choice of itineraries to prominent places worldwide, but each has distinct qualities and focus. Norwegian Cruise Line is recognized for its "Freestyle Cruising" ideas, Carnival is known for its fun and festive environment, and Royal Caribbean is known for its revolutionary ships and bold excursions. The greatest option for an individual tourist will ultimately rely on their interests and trip intentions.

Regarding the element under discussion, each of the three cruise lines offers various itineraries, primarily the Mediterranean, Alaskan, and Caribbean. They take travelers to almost every captivating destination on scenic routes while offering adventurous and exploration opportunities. The three cruise lines differ in the length of their itinerary length. RCL offers longer itineraries compared to the other two cruise lines. RCL arranges cruises for up to 14 nights, while Carnival and Norwegian's longest itineraries last for up to 7 and 4 nights (Peručić, 2020). In relation to destination varieties, among the three cruise lines, Norwegian offers the widest range of destinations in Europe.

Onboard Activities

The three cruise lines have major similarities and differences concerning their onboard activities. For instance, the Royal Caribbean has innovative activities that are adrenaline-fueled and convenient for the younger generation (Priebbenow, 2021). On the other hand, Carnival Cruise Line offers a party-like environment and atmosphere while mainly focusing on nightlife, music, and entertainment (Carnival Cruise Line, 2017). NCL differs from the above two in that it offers freestyle cruising, thus allowing guests to dine, among other activities and facilities for families such as multi-story water slides and ropes course. The three cruise lines are similar in that they have spas, pools, sports facilities, and fitness centers. They also offer theater shows, live music, and comedy performances (Chang et al., 2019). The three cruise lines also offer teen and kid programs such as play areas, supervised group activities, and age-appropriate activities.

Customer Service

The three cruise lines are similar in delivering their customer services, and they all offer 24/7 guest services to address any issues a guest might have. They also have loyalty programs comprising exclusive events, special discounts, and priority check-ins (Chang et al., 2019). There

are also set policies among the three cruise lines which are put in place to ensure the security and safety of travelers. Despite the similarities, the three cruise lines differ in some aspects. NCL offers its customers a concierge and butler service, while CCL and RCL do not provide such services.

Limitations

The research paper was subject to several limitations. First, the research was only focused on the major cruise lines. The paper's focus was more skewed to the dominant cruise lines that are recognized globally. Also, customer reviews slightly influenced some of the findings made in the paper. However, only reviews related to other reliable sources were used for this research. The research results were also specific to a specific time, considering that only resources within the past five years were used. This is prone to changes since the industry keeps evolving.

Implications

This study's results have several implications for cruise companies and prospective passengers. It first emphasizes the significance of distinctive qualities and products in luring and keeping clients. Successful cruise lines can differentiate themselves from rivals with innovative ships, activities, and meal selections. Second, the value of providing excellent customer service is emphasized. Royal Caribbean and Norwegian Cruise Line stand out for going above and beyond to ensure client pleasure, even though all three cruise companies under study are known for offering exceptional customer service. The success of every business depends on having repeat clients and favorable word-of-mouth referrals, both of which can be attained by offering exceptional customer service. Lastly, the results of this study might assist prospective passengers in making informed choices while picking a cruise holiday. Travelers can select the cruise company and itinerary that best meets their requirements and interests by considering each cruise

line's distinctive qualities, strengths, and shortcomings. This research can lead future researchers to discover more about the impact of a destination or onboard activities on passenger satisfaction.

In conclusion, major cruise lines Royal Caribbean, Carnival, and Norwegian Cruise Line each have distinctive qualities, strengths, and shortcomings. While Norwegian Cruise Line has established a reputation for its "Freestyle Cruising" idea and Carnival is well recognized for its "Fun Ships" approach, Royal Caribbean is noted for its innovative ships and emphasis on adventure. All three cruise companies provide a selection of itineraries to well-liked locations, but Royal Caribbean offers a broader selection of locales, such as Asia and Australia. The three cruise lines provide different onboard entertainment, food choices, and customer service. This research study has compared and contrasted these three main cruise lines to highlight the distinctive qualities, strengths, and weaknesses which assist future passengers in making well-informed selections when selecting a cruise trip. The findings also have implications for the cruise sector, emphasizing the value of distinctive features and exceptional customer support.

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