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OCTOBER NEWSLETTER

As October unfolds, the air begins to crisp, signaling the arrival of autumn. The vibrant hues of orange and gold paint the landscape, and pumpkins dot the fields, ready to be carved into festive decorations. This time of year brings a sense of warmth and nostalgia, as families gather to celebrate the changing seasons. The cooler temperatures invite cozy sweaters, warm drinks, and the delightful aroma of baked goods wafting through homes. It's a season that encourages reflection and gratitude, making it the perfect backdrop for planning upcoming celebrations.

With the holidays just around the corner, now is the ideal time to start thinking about Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's trips. Are you looking for a getaway to the Caribbean, a charming escape to the Mediterranean, or an adventure in Asia? As the days grow shorter and the nights longer, the anticipation of holiday festivities fills the air. Don't miss the opportunity to book those trips and embrace the spirit of the season, ensuring that this October is not just about the pumpkins, but also about the adventures that lie ahead.



FEATURED CRUISE OF THE MONTH

This month, the spotlight is on the Resilient Lady New Year's Ahoy cruise, an exciting opportunity to ring in the New Year in style. Join the SmokyMtnBears and hosts Chris and Alex as they embark on a spectacular 7-day journey from the vibrant port of San Juan. This cruise promises an unforgettable experience filled with adventure, relaxation, and celebration, making it the perfect way to welcome the new year with friends and fellow travelers.

The itinerary includes stunning ports of call such as Tortola, Bridgetown, and Castries, each offering unique sights and experiences. From the breathtaking beaches of Tortola to the rich culture of Bridgetown, there is something for everyone to enjoy. However, with limited availability, now is the time to secure your spot on this incredible voyage. Don't miss out on the chance to create lasting memories as you sail into the new year aboard the Resilient Lady!

**Call us at 865-973-9744 or visit us at
www.theconnectedtraveler.com**

THE TRAVEL SOCIETY SUMMIT

This year's Society Summit transcended the typical conference experience; it was a vibrant gathering of professionals united by a shared passion for crafting unforgettable travel experiences. I was privileged to receive one of three awards, being named a Champion during the event—a recognition that highlighted the hard work, dedication, and commitment to excellence that we, as tour operators, travel designers, and industry professionals, consistently strive for. Beyond personal accolades, the Society Summit provided invaluable opportunities for growth. Over the course of the event, I engaged in 60 one-on-one supplier meetings—yes, 60! These sessions proved to be incredibly fruitful, enabling me to forge connections with suppliers across the travel spectrum, including luxury hotels, tour operators, airlines, and cruise lines. These interactions not only solidified my partnerships but also broadened my understanding of new and exciting offerings that I can now present to my clients, along with some exclusive client opportunities!



THE CONNECTED TRAVELER ON SUN PRINCESS

The SmokyMtnBears were thrilled to be invited to experience the all-new Sun Princess by Princess Cruise Lines on a quick 3-day voyage that showcased the incredible features of this remarkable ship. Recently named the best mega-ship by Conde Nast Readers' Choice, the Sun Princess is redefining the cruise experience. This is not your grandparents' ship; it offers a modern and luxurious atmosphere that caters to a new generation of travelers seeking adventure and relaxation at sea.

One of the standout features of the Sun Princess is the innovative Sanctuary Collection, which presents a unique "ship within a ship" concept. This exclusive area provides guests with a serene escape, complete with upscale amenities and personalized service, ensuring a tranquil retreat amidst the excitement of the cruise. From stunning dining options to state-of-the-art entertainment, the Sun Princess promises an unforgettable journey that combines luxury and adventure, making it a must-visit for anyone looking to set sail in style. This ship will be ideal for viewing and for a Panama Canal or Alaska itinerary.



International LifeLine™ is a critical service that provides on-demand incident management and emergency response worldwide, ensuring travelers can return home safely during emergencies. From natural disasters to political unrest, this service bridges the gap where traditional travel insurance falls short, offering medical evacuation, political evacuation, and kidnap resolution without any extra costs.

We believe this is so necessary that we have waived commissions. Enter code TCT20 at checkout for a 20% discount. This can be a per trip or per year membership.

Join us from May 31 to June 7, 2025, for an unforgettable journey with Explora Journeys, sailing from Istanbul to Athens. This all-inclusive cruise begins in vibrant Istanbul and takes us through the captivating ports of Bozcaada, Bodrum, Rhodes, Samos, and Paros, before we disembark in historic Athens. Enhance your experience with an exclusive 3-day pre-cruise stay in Turkey, where we'll explore Istanbul's rich culture and offer optional excursions to the otherworldly landscapes of Cappadocia. This voyage blends luxury, culture, and adventure—don't miss your chance to sail with us



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AMAZING



Meeting with Virgin Voyages' Leadership: My Exclusive Experience with Nirmal Saverimuttu and John Diorio

As a travel operator and travel advisor, I've had the pleasure of sailing with some of the most innovative cruise lines in the world and meeting amazing talent along the way. Recently, however, I had an exclusive opportunity to sit down with Virgin Voyages' CEO, Nirmal Saverimuttu, and John Diorio, VP of North American Sales, alongside five other exceptional travel advisors, many of which I am honored to call friends. This was a unique opportunity to reinstall my confidence in Virgin Voyages and ignite a deeper passion for cruising and what it means for my clients. For those that have been on my Virgin cruises, you know the difficulty groups can pose. Their failure to be able to plan in advance, especially for those with Type A personalities, has put me on edge numerous times. The good news: Virgin heard what we had to say and per my most recent meeting, they are responding.



What made the meeting truly special was the open dialogue between Virgin Voyages' leadership and the travel advisors. We had the chance to ask important questions and discuss pressing issues, and Nirmal and John's responses were refreshingly transparent. Here's a recap of the key topics we covered:

1. Volatility in Pricing: A major focus of our conversation was the current fluctuations in pricing. Virgin Voyages is aware of the challenges this poses for both travel advisors and their clients. Nirmal shared that they are looking to shift towards a "set it and forget it" pricing model. This approach would allow for greater predictability and ensure that early bookers truly get the benefit of the best prices. This shift aims to bring more stability to the pricing structure and create a sense of confidence for clients who book well in advance

2. Changes in Benefits and Disappearing Perks: Many of us raised concerns about changes to onboard benefits, including perks that have been removed or altered. Nirmal and John were upfront about the fact that Virgin is aware some benefits have been phased out or changed unexpectedly. They assured us they are actively working to address these issues and hope to have solutions soon. They even committed to make sure that travel advisors will be informed prior to implementation of changes moving forward. They also acknowledged the significant price increases on some onboard services, such as laundry, and reassured us that Virgin is committed to reviewing and possibly adjusting these prices to ensure a better experience for guests.

3. New Groups/Circles Policy: One of the more exciting announcements is the upcoming introduction of Virgin's new groups and circles policy. While details are still under wraps, Nirmal and John hinted that this policy will be revealed shortly, likely around the time Virgin announces its highly anticipated Alaskan sailings. Though the new policy promises greater flexibility, they made it clear that there will still be some limitations, particularly with dining arrangements. However, the potential for future price freezes on group bookings is definitely a promising development, making group travel with Virgin Voyages even more appealing.

What This Means for My Clients

After this insightful meeting, we are well-equipped to provide our clients with updated information and new selling points for Virgin Voyages. The “set it and forget it” pricing model will be a game-changer for those who like to book early and secure the best value. Plus, Virgin's commitment to reviewing price increases on board means a better overall experience for travelers.

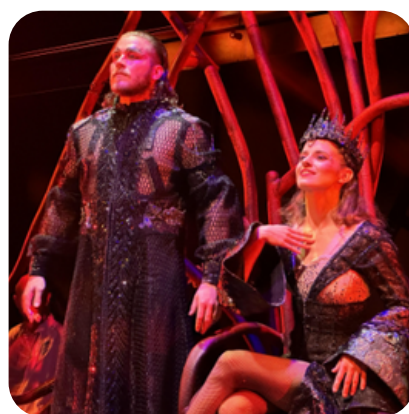


For group travelers, the upcoming changes to the groups/circles policy offer exciting possibilities. While there may still be limitations in areas like dining, the chance for price freezes and the expanded flexibility in managing group bookings means we'll be able to create even more tailored experiences for my clients.

Final Thoughts: Looking Ahead with Confidence

The exclusive meeting with Nirmal Saverimuttu and John Diorio was an invaluable opportunity to learn firsthand how Virgin Voyages is addressing some of the key concerns facing its sailors and the travel advisor community. Their focus on refining pricing models, improving perks, and introducing more flexible group policies shows that they are dedicated to evolving with the industry and listening to feedback.

As we look ahead to new sailings and updated policies, I'm confident that Virgin Voyages will continue to offer innovative and unforgettable travel experiences. I can't wait to share these updates with my clients and continue helping them discover the world in style aboard Virgin Voyages.



Experience the future of cruising with **MSC Cruises' World America**, set to debut in 2025! This groundbreaking vessel will redefine luxury and innovation at sea, offering stunning designs, eco-friendly technology, and diverse dining and entertainment options. Whether you're a solo traveler, family, or group looking to make unforgettable memories, MSC World America has something extraordinary for everyone. We're excited to announce we have several group options lined up, making it easier than ever to join the journey. Visit www.theconnectedtraveler.com to check out the details and secure your spot today!

NEW
2025





November 23-30, 2024



7 Day Western Caribbean Thanksgiving Cruise with the Bears!

Don't spend all day in the Kitchen on Thanksgiving. Come join the SmokyMtnBears as we set sail through the Caribbean!

December 28-January 4, 2025

Resilient New Years Ahoy with It's Chris & Alex, the SmokyMtnBears, and The Bearettes!

Join us and ring in NYE Virgin Voyages Style!



March 23-30, 2025

Bears Birthday Bash Party with the SmokyMtnBears as we celebrate Scott's Birthday!

New Orleans, Costa Maya, Roatan, Cozumel



May 24-31, 2025

Danube Celebration Bash

Passau, Budapest, Linz & more!



May 31-June 7, 2025

A Journey to the Turkish Riviera and Ancient Vineyards

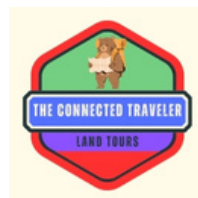
Join the SmokyMtnBears on this Land/Cruise Tour. We will start in Istanbul for and do 3 days in Turkey before we set sail on Explora Journeys.



June 24-30, 2025

The historic charm of Cartagena and celebrate love and diversity at Medellin Pride!

Join the SmokyMtnBears on this land Tour of Cartagena and Medellin Pride!





Aug 17-30, 2025

Portsmouth to Ireland, Scotland & More.

Join the SmokyMtnBears as we cross the pond and visit Ireland and Scotland.



Oct 26-Nov 2, 2025 **NEW**
Star of the Seas-Sister ship to Icon of the Seas

Join the SmokyMtnBears on the All New Star of the Seas out of Port Canaveral.



April 7-12, 2026

LA Mermaid Voyage

We think it is about time Virgin has a MerMan....Join us on this sailing as we launch a Mer Man takeover of the Brilliant Lady



Aug 8-22, 2026

MUST DO!

14 Day Spain, France & Portugal

Join the SmokyMtnBears as we explore Spain, France and Portugal during the Solar Eclipse on Princess Cruises.



Sept 20-27, 2026

7 Day Inside Passage-on the Star Princess

Set sail from Seattle, Washington, to Vancouver, Canada, on a stunning 7-day Alaskan cruise—all for just a \$99 deposit per person!



Nov 21-Dec 2, 2026

Cook & Society Islands



Join the SmokyMtnBears as we visit the Cook & Society Islands, which includes Tahiti!

