



For cruise passengers, volunteering combines vacations with giving back

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MIAMI, Feb. 22, 2016 /PRNewswire/ -- Grab a piña colada and relax on the sun deck of a cruise ship, but reserve some time to lend a helping hand. For many people, cruising takes on new meaning when you, for instance, hit the dance floor to help raise money for children's disease research on Carnival Cruise Line ships or join fellow passengers on a walk to raise money for cancer organizations on Holland America Line.

Why do cruise vacations and volunteering go hand in hand?

Michelle Sutter, a long-time volunteer in such activities as mentoring single mother refugees from Africa and now a staffer for the new social impact-focused cruise line Fathom from Carnival Corporation. "Fun is an understatement. The experience of volunteering feeds your soul."

"For me it's simple. Life is not complete unless you are helping others," said Michelle Sutter, a long-time volunteer in such activities as mentoring single mother refugees from Africa and now a staffer for the new social impact-focused cruise line Fathom from Carnival Corporation. "Fun is an understatement. The experience of volunteering feeds your soul."

Miami to the Dominican Republic in April, passengers will have opportunity to spend up to three days helping locals. And starting May 1, Carnival Corporation is planning to launch Fathom cruises to Cuba with guests participating in specially designed cultural exchange activities.

The ultimate do-good, feel-good experience is on Fathom, a cruise line created specifically for people who love to travel and want to make a difference in the world. On the 704-passenger Adonia, set to debut on cruises from Miami to the Dominican Republic in April, passengers will have opportunity to spend up to three days helping locals. And starting May 1, Carnival Corporation is planning to launch Fathom cruises to Cuba with guests participating in specially designed cultural exchange activities.

Dominican Republic, for instance, Fathom travelers will volunteer to teach conversational English to kids in nearby schools, assist local entrepreneurs at, for instance, a chocolate cooperative, and make water filters out of locally sourced clay and other materials, help with forestation projects and participate in other one-on-one activities – with time, if a traveler chooses, to spend on the beach or in cultural pursuits.

Included are on-the-ship seminars and organized experiences on land. In the Dominican Republic, for instance, Fathom travelers will volunteer to teach conversational English to kids in nearby schools, assist local entrepreneurs at, for instance, a chocolate cooperative, and make water filters out of locally sourced clay and other materials, help with forestation projects and participate in other one-on-one activities – with time, if a traveler chooses, to spend on the beach or in cultural pursuits.

While Fathom is one end of the spectrum, cruise passengers of all ages have long shown a propensity to give back.

Barcelona, and the line will make a small donation on your behalf to the UNESCO World Heritage Fund.

Little effort is often required. On ultra-luxury line Seabourn, for instance, you can take a ship-organized tour to a UNESCO World Heritage Site such as the World of Gaudi (including Sagrada Familia Cathedral) in Barcelona, and the line will make a small donation on your behalf to the UNESCO World Heritage Fund.

Germany, AIDA Cruises passengers can participate in New Year's Eve fundraising raffles to raise money for the German-based SOS Children's Villages, in support of refugee and disaster relief. Through the non-profit Association of AIDA Friends of the Ocean, guests and cruise line employees also have opportunity to assist environmental and marine conservation efforts including beach cleanups.

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Vanuatu, one of the destinations the line's ships visit. For \$10, passengers can purchase a knitting kit and instructions. Hundreds of blankets have been completed and donated to the maternity ward of the Vila Central Hospital in Port Vila, Vanuatu.

The "Born to Knit" program on P&O Cruises Australia ships encourages socializing as a group while they knit blankets for newborn babies on the island nation of Vanuatu, one of the destinations the line's ships visit. For \$10, passengers can purchase a knitting kit and instructions. Hundreds of blankets have been completed and donated to the maternity ward of the Vila Central Hospital in Port Vila, Vanuatu.

Vanuatu. A \$1 donation is added to every adult passenger's shipboard account. Guests can choose to opt out or up the amount. In addition, the navigational chart is auctioned at the end of every sailing to raise money for the charity. The line is on track to raise \$1 million by the end of the year – donations so far going to build kindergartens as well as an aid post and health dispensary on remote islands.

Through the P&O Cruises Pacific Partnership, the line also supports Save the Children's efforts on Vanuatu. A \$1 donation is added to every adult passenger's shipboard account. Guests can choose to opt out or up the amount. In addition, the navigational chart is auctioned at the end of every sailing to raise money for the charity. The line is on track to raise \$1 million by the end of the year – donations so far going to build kindergartens as well as an aid post and health dispensary on remote islands.

Caribbean and other destinations can join fun "Groove for St. Jude" dance parties (\$10 donation) to raise money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis. Carnival Cruise Line has raised more than \$8 million for St. Jude since 2010, and has set a fundraising goal of \$15 million by 2020. Kids onboard can do their part by purchasing (or encouraging parents to purchase) a keepsake, build-your-own stuffed bear, with proceeds going to St. Jude.

Passengers on Carnival Cruise Line ships in the sunny Caribbean and other destinations can join fun "Groove for St. Jude" dance parties (\$10 donation) to raise money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis. Carnival Cruise Line has raised more than \$8 million for St. Jude since 2010, and has set a fundraising goal of \$15 million by 2020. Kids onboard can do their part by purchasing (or encouraging parents to purchase) a keepsake, build-your-own stuffed bear, with proceeds going to St. Jude.

Carrie Underwood to support American military families, through the non-profit Operation Homefront – special dog tags – inscribed with Honor. Family. Fun. -- can be purchased on the line's ships and donations can also be made via Carnival.com/HonorFamilyFun.

Carnival Cruise Line also recently joined forces with seven-time Grammy Award-winning country music superstar Carrie Underwood to support American military families, through the non-profit Operation Homefront – special dog tags – inscribed with Honor. Family. Fun. -- can be purchased on the line's ships and donations can also be made via Carnival.com/HonorFamilyFun.

\$4.7 million since 2006, for six cancer organizations in the U.S., Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, Germany and the U.K. On each sailing, passengers donate \$20 to join the walk and receive a t-shirt, wristband and post-walk reception. In 2016, the line's ships will host more than 500 such events.

With "On Deck for a Cause," Holland America Line passengers and employees have raised more than \$4.7 million since 2006, for six cancer organizations in the U.S., Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, Germany and the U.K. On each sailing, passengers donate \$20 to join the walk and receive a t-shirt, wristband and post-walk reception. In 2016, the line's ships will host more than 500 such events.

\$15). On each voyage, a nautical chart of the cruise, signed by the captain and senior officers, is auctioned off with the proceeds benefiting the non-profit Princess Cruises Community Foundation, which supports worldwide charities and disaster relief.

Princess Cruises' shipboard "On Deck for a Cure" raises money for the fight against breast cancer via the Susan G. Komen Foundation, passengers participating in organized 5k deck walks (for a donation of \$15). On each voyage, a nautical chart of the cruise, signed by the captain and senior officers, is auctioned off with the proceeds benefiting the non-profit Princess Cruises Community Foundation, which supports worldwide charities and disaster relief.

Juneau, Alaska, and assist scientists by drawing plankton samples or using a GPS camera to identify whales and record their behaviors.

There are also ways to volunteer off the ship. Holland America passengers can book "Cruise With Purpose" shore excursions, small-group outings where you might, for instance, board a research boat in Juneau, Alaska, and assist scientists by drawing plankton samples or using a GPS camera to identify whales and record their behaviors.

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