

Lessons Learned

Ionian Cruise, 2015

Suggestion #1: Study the CCA Cruise Planning Guide and Lessons Learned from previous Cruises!

Suggestion #2: Repeat Suggestion #1.

Amplification and additional Lessons Learned

- It is important to have a *good* plan before announcing the cruise. This might seem self evident but it is essential to marketing the cruise and developing a critical mass to support the events. Having a preliminary plan should allow the committee to know how large a cruise can be supported ahead of time. Some limits will be set by the availability of charter boats, the size of the venues, and a beginning assessment of the costs. Attempting to develop a plan may actually prove the impracticality of a cruise location requiring a different choice. We had to make a major change after announcing the Cruise due to the lack of a proper venue for the final event in Lefkas. A large crewed charter boat had already been contracted and the period of their contract did not continue to perfectly coincide with the Cruise events. Oops!
- A large cruise in a *far away* location requires significant time to prepare. (*far away* = less than comprehensive local knowledge) 18 months would be barely adequate lead time for a dedicated chairman with some experience. Two years should be would be better. Three years is a long commitment for anyone.
- In a *far away*, especially in a *foreign far away* place, contracting with the best agent that can be found was very advantageous. They were able to assist with language, events planning, local officials, contacts, caterers, etc. Qualifications include being a professional 1) having done events in suitable venues many times before, 2) good references from clients and vendors, 3) an ability to work with you (a perceived ability may be all that is possible before getting into the real work). In our case the management of a venue we desired was able to recommend the right person.
- A large part of the success of this cruise was due to good communication with the participants starting immediately after their initial indication of interest. For the Ionian we were able to use the Internet and specifically the revamped Club web site very effectively for this. Frequent detailed updates on the planning kept the anticipation level high and provided forums for questions to be developed and answered. There were some concerns expressed about security as we were near the “Nightly News” in Greece. Being on location and sending rapid, truthful replies resulted in no one dropping out due to their concerns.

- Future cruises should be prepared to utilize and improve upon the management tools that were developed for this cruise by Les Crane and Mike Moradzadeh (Web Master) within the rebuilt web site. Some of these included automatic notifications of payments to multiple committee members, automatic replies to those payments to the members, and downloadable spread sheets from the database created by these payments and questionnaires. Coordination with the webmaster will be important. A knowledgeable committee member will be helpful. Les' efforts were essential in coordinating with Michael to make this happen for the first time.
- We avoided all mailings except for a few refund checks after the cruise. Using the credit card (soon to be PayPal we hope) payments to the Treasurer with automatic confirmations to the client plus to the cruise committee was very helpful. We made significant progress within the club on this project. Future cruises should follow this format. The c/c bank fees (~4%) were a good value as compared to the time/effort/expense of using checks and snail mail.
- The Ionian cruise, due to its location in a digitally well- connected area, was able to use e-mail as our primary communication method right through to the end of the cruise. We insisted that each boat have access to the Internet. The committee coordinated the purchases of the connectivity devices and data plans.* The extra work assisting everyone to be online was worth it but a significant amount time was involved, enough to occupy a single volunteer. *Not every cruise location will have suitable connectivity for this.* Rather than a VHF morning chat a **daily briefing** was e-mailed to every participant and other interested parties. (Hat tip to Ski Gam coordinators, John Robinson and Barbara Watson) VHF was utilized at various points but group notices and replies to the committee were effectively completed by e-mail.
- Additionally, the **Ionian Cruise Book** was made interactive when downloaded to a device. Through embedded links participants could access historical articles on *Wikipedia.com* as well as navigational data and local knowledge from *cruiserswiki.org*. The *Imray Nautical Guides* for Greece were also available as eBooks for a very modest fee. These turned the Cruise Book (when downloaded to a device) into a very complete reference book when an Internet connection was available. There were economical (Navionics) charting aps also available which were more than adequate for navigation and planning. These were much better than the tiny GPS plotters provided by the charter boats.

*Earlier lessons learned included "the cruise committee should not get involved in chartering". I want to reinforce that knowledge. This would be a "tar baby" that would never go away. A corollary of this rule: "the cruise committee should be very cautious of getting involved in cell phones and data plans." We found it essential to organize the data access for everyone and hoped an outside contractor would be the answer. Still it required some daily attention throughout the cruise. Any activity of this sort can occupy enough time to require another volunteer.

- **Crewed charters:** Boats, some large, with captain, cook, and mates worked well on this cruise. We avoided problems that had occurred on a previous cruise by insisting and confirming that these yachts would attend each of the events. Each member responsible for the charter confirmed with the yachts captain that “he and the boat were capable of arriving on time and using the harbor facilities at the venue.” Happily these boats accommodated several members that would have been unable to attend without assistance.
- ***A la carte* attendance** of the cruise has been and will continue to be a problem. Some members will have conflicts and want to attend only part of the cruise. Managing a large cruise is difficult enough without having to keep track of the ones and twos with their comings and goings. We resisted these inquiries as we were carrying a wait list. A couple of members were unhappy. Learning from this experience I recommend the following:
 - 1) Anyone coming to any part of the cruise should pay the deposit and register as a participant. This will cover their fixed costs, will put their personal information into the control spreadsheets (plus the Cruise Book), and will provide their “swag bag” and gifts.
 - 2) Some events can accommodate a variable number of people better than others. A stand up reception for instance could absorb “extras” without unwarranted hardship whereas a sit-down dinner requires much more planning and a commitment. A cost for the attended event would not be hard to estimate.
 - 3) One worry: should it become widely known that an event could be skipped and not paid for, it is possible that so many members might want to attend in an *a la carte* fashion that a planned event might fail.
 - 4) The Cruise Chair must assess the capabilities and possibilities of the committee, the venues, and the vendors before agreeing to accept *a la carte* attendance.
- **More difficult** was assisting the Charter Operator with members he determined to be unfit for chartering. It will be hard to know this in advance. If you sense this situation developing on your cruise, contact me and I can provide more details. Happily our event participants had a good cruise with hired crew providing excellent help.
- Finally, expect **surprises**. Ours, thankfully, did not increase our costs but surprises can be expensive. Therefore, budget a fund anticipating extra expenses. Both our dinner vendors, during the last week before the Cruise, changed the menu. Since the earliest planning we were to have fish as one of the menu choices. Both vendors had multiple excuses as to why they could not now serve fish, including “the service would take too much time, more staff, be very complicated, not enough plates...”, as if these were not known factors from the outset. I believe the real issue was the cost of fish had risen a great deal and they could not make their numbers work. They along with our agent manipulated us very well in the final moments of planning and we were forced to accept the “no fish” menus at the previously agreed upon price. Learned lesson: expect surprises and try to be flexible. It all worked out fine.

Best Wishes for a Successful Cruise,

Steve James
Ionian Cruise Chair

Contacts of Suppliers for Ionian Cruise

Pins, buttons, emblems

National Custom Insignia, Inc.
PO Box 1190
Oldsmar, FL 34677-1190

phone = 727-781-8806
www.lapelpins.com.....this is the place to go for an online catalogue
.....

Name tags and plastic plaques with custom logo

EDCO
3702 Davie Blvd.
Fort Lauderdale
954-587-0137
800-377-8646
www.edco.com
.....

Plastic cups, frosted with logo printed
Luggage tags

ALPHA PROMO WORLD
321-751-0022 Fax: 321-751-4922
sales@alphapromoworld.com
Every Wholesale Promotional
Product under the Sun... And
.....

Custom cruise flags, cheap and light weight
Michael Moradzadeh (SFO) was the contact, below is the firm

Shanhecheng Arts&Crafts Co.,Ltd
Room 1022-1025,HongYun Dihao International Mansion,No.151 Wusi Road,Fuzhou
China
Tel:0086-591-87304636 Fax:0086-591-87816036
Email to penny@china-flag-makers.com

Bags, custom with embroidery

<http://genclercanta.com/>

Akif Sadriler, owner

...this is in Istanbul, Turkey. Could be a good value even including international shipping.