

Teen and Adult Activities Onboard a Cruise Ship

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to better understand the consumer's viewpoint of teen and adult activities in a commercial recreation setting such as a cruise ship. While research exists examining activities in other venues of commercial recreation, there is limited information on activities for teens and adults onboard cruise ships. In addition to observation and participation in onboard activities, survey and interview methods were used to collect the necessary data. The results indicate that there are noteworthy differences in the number of onboard activities that each age demographic participated in. The results also indicate that the types of onboard activities favored by each age demographic vary as well. Program directors working for cruise lines and other commercial recreation venues may find this data to be of particular interest when planning activities for teenagers and adults.

INTRODUCTION

The cruise ship industry is growing. Since 1980 the cruise industry has grown 8% but since 2002 the growth rate has leveled off (Petrick, 2004). The industry is in need of attracting new clients and retaining old ones. With the number of cruise ships doubling since the early 1990's cruise lines need to have quality activities that will attract and retain these clients (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005).

Satisfaction versus Dissatisfaction is frequently studied in tourism but the need for research pertaining to cruise lines is growing with the fast-pace of the industry growth. Little is known about the satisfaction and dissatisfaction as it relates to activities onboard the cruise ships.

This valuable information could lead to improvements in the activities and more age appropriate activities. If quality activities are offered onboard, passengers are more likely to have a better experience, which will increase the probability of retaining them as a client.

METHODS

This research was conducted using multiple data collection techniques. In addition to the observation of onboard activities and first-hand participation in said activities, surveys and interviews (in the form of a focus group) were utilized. Observations of activities were made onboard the *Voyager of the Seas*, a Royal Caribbean cruise ship, as it traveled on a seven (7) night cruise through the Mediterranean Sea. Observations were made both as a passive bystander and as an active participant in the activities. Immediately following the completion of the cruise, a survey was distributed to members of a breadth of age groups.¹ Based on the preliminary data gathered in the surveys, a formal interview format was established and was administered as a focus group study. In this focus group, participants were asked to describe all of the activities that they had participated in onboard the ship, as well as any activities that they wished that they had participated in but did not. Furthermore, participants were encouraged to share their thoughts on the quality, variety, and age appropriateness of the onboard activities offered.

RESULTS

The results of the data collected indicate stark differences between young adults and older adults in terms of a) the types of activities that were participated in and/or desired and b) the rates of participation in activities onboard. Older adults, those ages 31 or higher, tend to participate in organized activities, largely due to their structured nature. For example, 100% of those surveyed age 31 or higher participated in at least one theatre production put on

¹ The time spent onboard the *Voyager of the Seas* by all survey and focus group participants was congruent with every other participant

by the staff of Royal Caribbean; only 28.6% of adults under the age of 31 participated in at least one theatre production (See Figure 1).

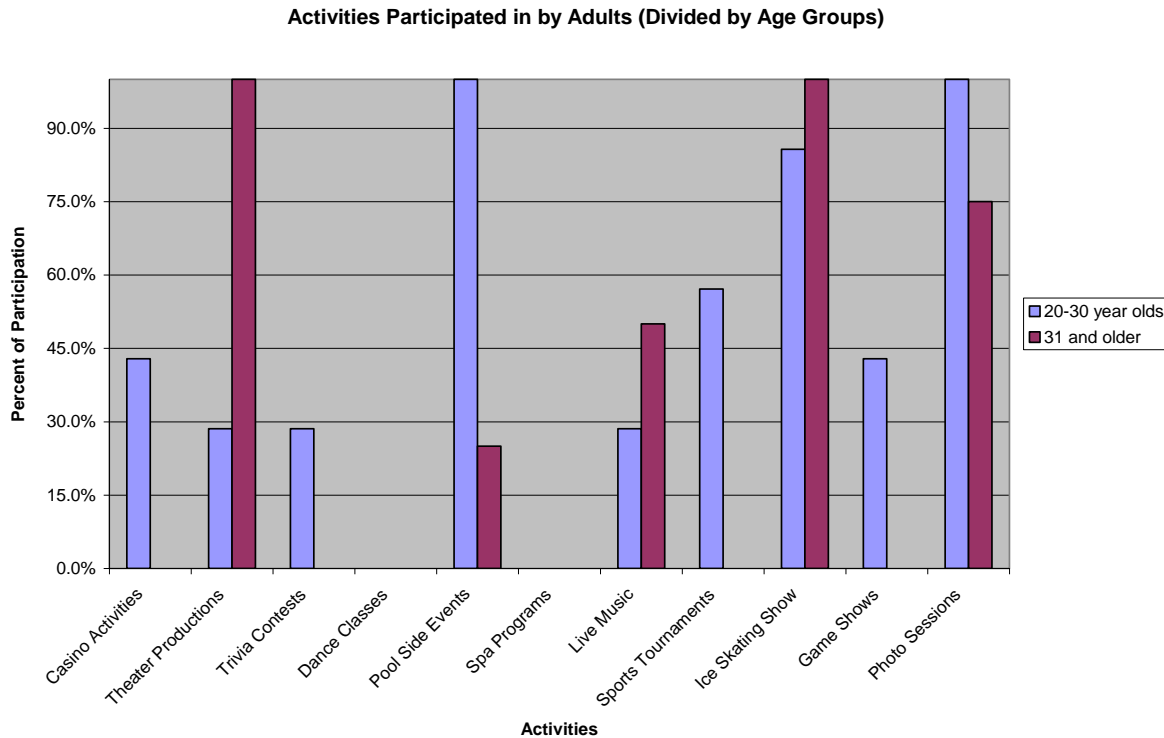


Figure 1. Older adults took a passive approach to onboard activities. Photo sessions and the Ice Skating Show were popular with adults – young and old alike.

One of the reasons discussed by older adults in the focus group for participating more in organized activities is because they are uncomfortable with unorganized activities, as there are aspects to the unorganized activities that are not widely understood (such as rules, game play et cetera). This differs with the organized activities such as theatre productions in that older adults are typically well aware of the expectations related with participation.

This is contrasted by the responses of young adults who were typically interested in the free-flowing nature of the unorganized activities. One example that was referenced frequently was the ShipShape program offered onboard, which rewarded participants with coupons redeemable for Royal Caribbean merchandise.

While younger adults may have been attracted to the prospects of earning free merchandise through the ShipShape program, older adults had little interest in this as they were more inclined to purchase any desired souvenirs in the official gift shop. This discovery was expected, as zero of the older adults participated in any of the ShipShape programs.

Data gathered from teenage participants also indicated a defined trend. Teenagers, much like the young adults, participated heavily in unorganized events while largely shying away from events that were highly structured and strictly scheduled. (See Figures 2.1 and 2.2)

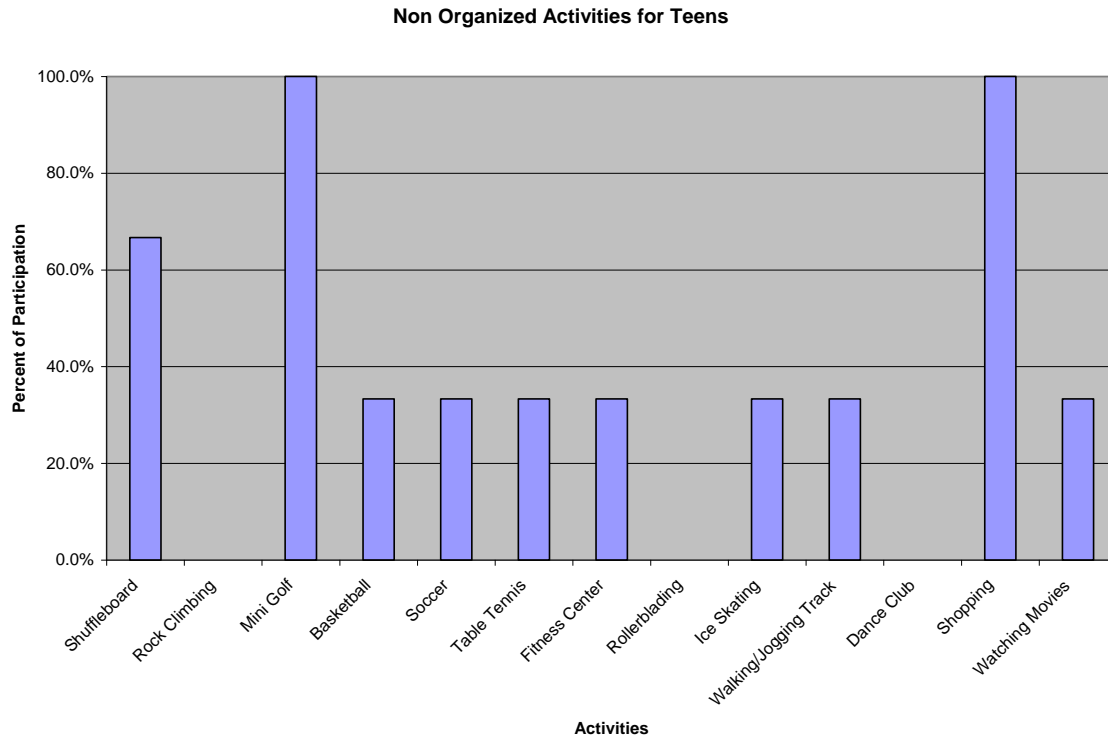


Figure 2.1. Teenagers participated in a wide variety of non-organized activities.

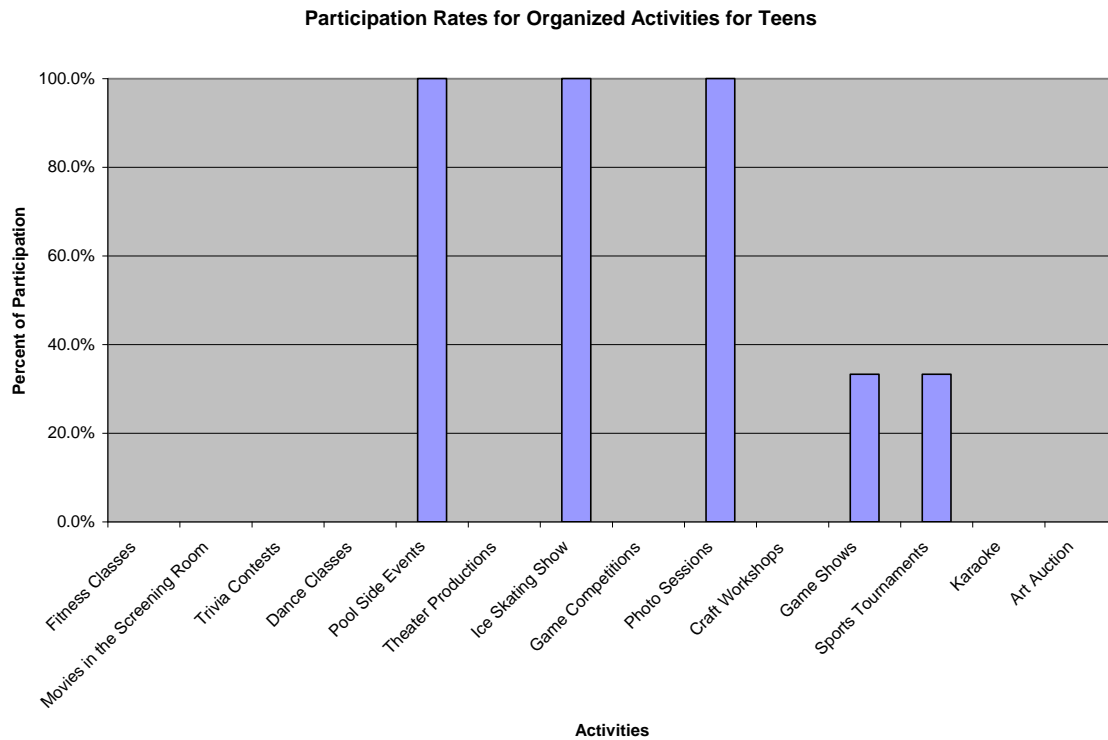


Figure 2.2. Teenagers showed a lack of interest in many of the organized activities with exception to poolside events, photo sessions and the ice skating show.

Even though there were organized events designed specifically for teenagers, many felt uncomfortable participating in these events due to two main reasons: the activities offered that targeted teenagers were not appealing and because teenagers felt isolated from their traveling companions not in their age bracket.

This leads to a source of conflict between the adults and teenagers. Many of the teenagers cited a desire to be able participate in the adult-specific activities while many of the adults cited a level of discomfort with teenagers participating in activities that were designed with adults-only in mind. Based on observations, the cruise staff tended to allow teenagers (some as young as thirteen) to participate in activities designed for those age eighteen and up, even as the adults mildly protested the presence of the teenagers.

One thing that both adults and teenagers agreed upon was their desire to participate in more onboard activities. However, the lack—in their opinion—of information available regarding the activities offered as well as the times at which they would take place inhibited their participation. Although the activities and related information were printed in a daily publication that was delivered to each stateroom, many of the research participants did not find this publication to be of any meaningful value. Many expressed a desire to have this information presented in a more public area, in a more prominent way.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the goals of this research was to determine whether or not sufficient activities existed onboard for the selected age groups. While both young adults and older adults agreed that the variety of activities offered was sufficient, teenagers expressed a different sentiment. This is important for program directors to keep in mind, as often times parents with teenage children expect their children to keep themselves entertained by finding activities that interest them. This idea appears to be a failure given the lack of interest articulated by the teenage participants.

Although there are differences in the interest levels in the various activities offered, three activities stood out in their ability to satisfy both teenagers and adults alike. Poolside events, photo sessions, and the ice skating show were attended at a rate of nearly 100% by all participants. Program directors need to build on the successes of these three programs and identify what characteristics make them as successful in order to transfer the successful characteristics to other activities.

A common grievance was the scheduled timetable for many of the activities and events. Many participants had high levels of interest in certain activities but were unable to attend or participate due to either a conflict in schedules (dinner seating, the return from shore excursions et cetera) or a conflict with other activities.

Finally, participants in the focus group expressed an interest in having select non-sanctioned activities included in the official activities schedule. The most commonly cited activity that was not formally offered by Royal Caribbean was shuffleboard.

LIMITATIONS

Among the limitations of this research was the lack of a diverse population. All participants in this research were ethnic Caucasians, the majority of them residing primarily in the Midwestern United States of America. Another limitation of this research was the lack of participants age 60 or older. One of the objectives of this research was to determine whether or not there were sufficient activities onboard for individuals in this age bracket, however, due to a lack of participants this question remains largely unanswered. Due to a lack of participants in the 60+ age demographic, the parameters of the adult surveys had to be redefined.

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