

EasyCruise

Sailing in an orange

A low-cost aviator takes on the cruise giants

THE Caribbean in winter is the world's biggest cruise market, dominated by giants such as Carnival, the world's biggest line since its purchase of P&O Cruises in 2000. It is a booming industry, with 11m passengers last year in America, where the number of cruise ships has almost doubled to 150 in the past five years. Most are floating hotels designed to ensure passengers spend their time—and money—on board. But last summer Stelios Haji-Ioannou, a British entrepreneur, turned the business model on its head to offer only basic on-board accommodation at rock-bottom prices to encourage passengers to enjoy themselves ashore.

Now Mr Haji-Ioannou, the founder of easyJet, Europe's first low-cost airline (and of some less profitable ventures such as internet cafés and car rentals), plans to sail a fleet of cruise ships into this lucrative market. At present, he has only one, which plied the Mediterranean in the summer and the Caribbean this winter. But nothing daunts a man prepared to launch a cruise business with a ship packed with cabins the colour of lifejackets—the bright orange of his aeroplanes, cafés, rental cars and everything else in easyworld. Mr Haji-Ioannou is looking for cheap places to dock ships around Miami: "I am more interested in marinas than normal ports," he says. He is also talking to shipyards about building a fleet of five spe-



Entrepreneur at sea

cial 500-passenger vessels at a price of around €30m (\$37m) apiece, about half the going rate for a liner. And he is hiring a designer for a new colour scheme.

He needs cheap boats and berths to capture the market he is aiming at. Passengers hop on and off whenever they want and are charged upwards of \$45 a night for accommodation only. Passengers can buy refreshments in a basic on-board café and bar, but there are none of the lavish salons and restaurants on a typical cruise liner. Not surprisingly, the typical easyCruise passenger is also somewhat different. The average passenger is 32 years old, compared with 54 on a traditional cruise ship. You probably need youth on your side to party in a different port every night.

The Economist, January 28th 2006

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JUN 2006
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