

There are different strokes for different folks — and a theme cruise is a great way to make like-minded friends.



The Shakespeare at Sea audience enjoys the Quiz Show.

Insight Cruises

An Insight in Sight

By Kara Williams

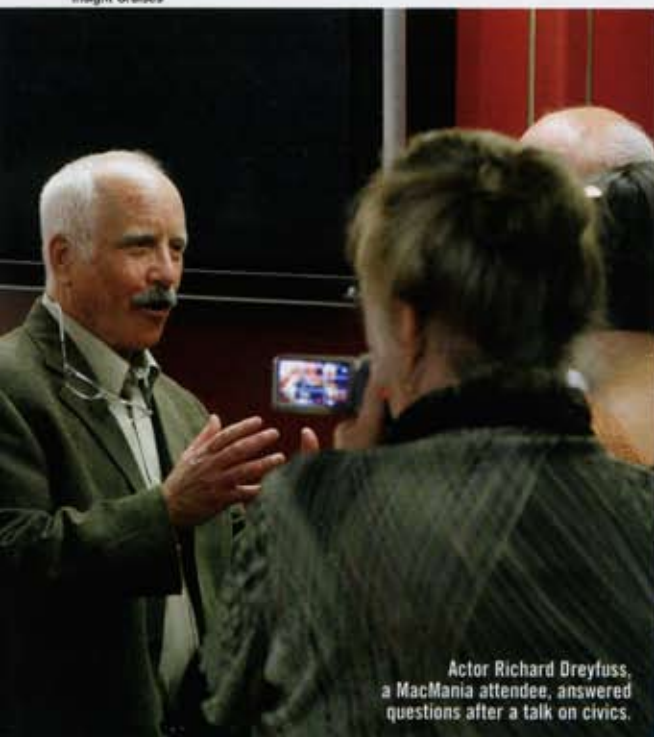
For many, the term “educational conference” likely conjures up images of boring lectures, staid speakers, windowless hotel ballrooms, and bland chicken cordon bleu. But Insight Cruises CEO and founder Neil Bauman brings a breath of fresh (salty!) air to continuing education with his themed conferences aboard cruise ships in popular destinations — from Alaska to the Mediterranean, and from the Caribbean to the Baltic Sea.

Do you love to play chess? Meet grandmasters on a Chess Moves cruise. Do you regularly quote the great Bard? Learn more about the preeminent playwright on Shakespeare at Sea. Can't get enough of your Macintosh computer? Live and breathe all things Apple at one of Insight Cruises' wildly popular MacMania conferences.

Insight Cruises participants spend a week or more indulging their passion in a particular hobby or subject, attending informative lectures by experts in the field, and “speaking the same language” with like-minded Insight cruisers. All the while, passengers enjoy the customary perks of cruising in exotic destinations: world-class dining, fun shore excursions, and onboard entertainment.

“Baby boomers thrive on education,” says Bauman, adding that Insight Cruises participants' average age is 62. “This generation tends to do multiple things at once. They're not content to just sit on a beach; they want to do something cultural, too. Their goals are more about personal growth, development, and life-long learning.”





Actor Richard Dreyfuss, a MacMania attendee, answered questions after a talk on civics.

There's plenty of time to relax as well during an active Insight cruise.



Indeed, Insight cruisers tend to be travelers who like to keep busy during days at sea, so Bauman intentionally schedules seminars while the ship is in motion. "Everyone needs downtime, including the speakers, and a chance to get out and explore," says Bauman, who claims Tortola as his favorite cruising destination for its striking landscape, peaceful atmosphere, and great food.

Joan Christensen of San Jose, California, who participated in a Shakespeare at Sea Insight Cruise last year, says, "Several other passengers and I noted that after our experience, we wouldn't want to take another cruise of this length (11 days) without having a similar conference or learning experience to participate in. It made the days at sea pass so quickly. If you aren't interested in the usual shipboard activities, this is a terrific alternative."

Insight's conferences, attended on average by about 100 participants, take place during regular, advertised cruise itineraries. The conference fee is separate from the cost of the cruise, so Insight attendees can travel

with someone who enjoys taking advantage of ship amenities, foregoing the Insight Cruises schedule.

Bleys Rose of Sebastopol, California, traveled with his 80-year-old mother on a Chess Moves Insight Cruise. "My mother wanted the full cruise experience of exotic ports and classy onboard service, while I was primarily interested in the conference schedule on chess," he recalls. "The cruise was outstanding. My mother was busy line dancing, watching cooking demonstrations, and attending nightclub acts, and for me, the highlights were socializing with and learning from the United States' leading chess experts."

In fact, the quality of onboard seminars is where Insight Cruises really shines. Bauman packs the conference schedules with lectures and workshops from top scholars in the field. "We strive to put together top-of-the-line educational experiences," says Bauman. "We research and hire speakers who are not only experts, but who will mix well with our patrons."

Presenters and attendees interact often on the ship, whether it's at group dinners (where Bauman encourages everyone to mingle, swapping seats and dinner partners after the first night), at cocktail parties, or on shore excursions.

"A highlight of our cruise was learning from people who we had only encountered in books and periodicals, and asking questions in a casual environment," says Henry Drygas of Olympia, Washington, who's looking forward to his second Insight Cruise in November.

MacMania fan Joan Hare of Sunnyvale, California, agrees: "The presenters are the people who write the books, the gurus of the Macintosh world," she says. "I like the up-close-and-personal contact with the presenters and the inside information and funny stories we get from them."

Bauman came up with the idea to develop educational cruises while he was aboard — you guessed it — a theme cruise. In 1998, he was cruising Alaska with fellow Trekkies, lounging on deck and reading a book about Perl,



Insight Cruises attendees listen closely during an educational lecture.

a computer programming language. He figured other “geeks” like him would enjoy a shipboard conference centered on Perl.

His first cruise, then operating under the name Geek Cruises, sailed in Alaska just two years later with 198 participants on board. For the first few years, cruise themes were all marketed toward computer programmers, with clever titles such as Java Jam, Oracle Odyssey, and Linux Lunacy.

Bauman attracted more general-interest consumers with MacMania in 2002 and Arctic Exposure, about digital photography, in 2003. “By 2004, with the dot-com crash, a lot of programmers were out of work,” Bauman recalls. “I branched out into other areas of interest out of necessity.”

Bauman made the switch from the company name Geek Cruises to Insight Cruises earlier this year. “The term ‘geek’ is fun and entertaining, but my demographic is changing,” he says. “Shakespeare lovers and opera-goers don’t consider themselves geeks, so it really has nothing to do with my program today.”

Bauman — or his wife and business partner, Theresa — takes part in every cruise. “I’m a people person,” he says. “The bigger the crowd, the more I enjoy myself.” And patrons can attest to his hands-on style.

“Neil does an excellent job organizing and managing these conferences,” says Christensen. “He was visible and present at each session, clearly available to answer questions or to try to resolve any issues.”

Bauman has deep interest in his cruises’ topics. He learned to play chess by age 5, majored in physics in college, and has been a Mac user since 1986. As for future Insight Cruises themes, Bauman says, “We will leave no intellectual pursuit unexplored. We will continue to go into the arts, and we’ve had a lot of requests for history.”

Four-time Insight cruiser Joan Hare has a few words of wisdom for folks who are considering an upcoming Insight itinerary: “Neil and his wife are the best. The only problem is that their cruises are addictive!” ■

JOIN THE CLUB

Upcoming Insight Cruises

Classical Latitude

October 11-23, 2008
Western Mediterranean (Barcelona to Venice);
Holland America Line’s *Zuiderdam*
Onboard classical music recitals, seminars, plus
gala evening musicals at select ports of call.

MacMania 8

November 5-15, 2008
Eastern Mediterranean (roundtrip
Savona/Genoa); Costa Cruises’ *Costa Atlantica*
Seminars include “Becoming a ‘Black Belt
Googler’ ” and “Using and Abusing your iPod
and iPhone.”

Shakespeare at Sea 2

November 7-17, 2008
French Caribbean (roundtrip Fort Lauderdale);
Holland America Line’s *Noordam*
Live performances, lectures, movies, and
acting workshops.

Bright Horizons 2

December 7-17, 2008
Southern Caribbean (roundtrip Fort Lauderdale);
Holland America Line’s *Noordam*
Lectures cover psychology, meteorology,
and astrophysics.

Evolution Emanation (Bright Horizons 3)

February 27-March 9, 2009
Panama Canal (roundtrip Fort Lauderdale)
Details forthcoming

Opera Odyssey 2 (Co-produced by the Metropolitan Opera Guild)

August 29-September 5, 2009; Alaska
(Seattle roundtrip)
Details forthcoming

For more information, visit
www.insightcruises.com or call (650) 787-5665.