

ABSTRACT

**From migration to cruise holidays.
Sailing the oceans in the 19th and early 20th centuries**

Silvia A. Conca Messina

During the 19th century, new regular intercontinental routes connected Europe to US and Latin America, transporting mail, merchandise and an increasing number of passengers. Transoceanic transports provided little in the comfort for those cooped on board. Nevertheless, the shipping companies constantly improved the features, the engines, the construction materials of their ships, which shifted from traditional sailing vessels to bigger and faster steam powered liners.

The evolution of the ships went together with the transformation of the business strategies. The rivalry among European nations pushed towards a competition to build faster and more efficient liners able to carry passengers across the oceans. In the second half of the 19th century passengers were mostly migrants in search of a new land of hope, but little by little - beside the uncomfortable third class - new facilities and an increasing number of amenities were provided for the first class (and partially the second class), transforming the journey in a holiday, the ship in a big hotel.

At the end of the 19th century, several ships became technologically obsolete and, at the same time, during the winter, many liners were not sufficiently used, as the number of passenger reduced a lot. Some companies decided to convert the older ships, adapting them at slow travelling, for touristic purposes. Even if the routes had still only one starting place and one arrival port, passengers could enjoy refined suites, fine food and entertainments. At the turn of the century, cruise lines like P&O, Cunard and White Star Line had successfully transformed once uncomfortable and dangerous ocean travel into something elegant and fashionable. Ships became similar to luxurious floating hotels, such as 5 stars hotels in London or Paris. The expansion of cruising wouldn't last, as World Wars I interrupted the building of new cruise ships, and many of them were used for troop transports. However, a new golden age took place between the two wars.

The essay will first focus on the early comfort and services provided for the first class in transoceanic transports. Then, it will concentrate on technological and building innovations, which transformed the ships and the intercontinental routes into a new way of travelling (cruise holidays), underlining differences and similarities among companies from different nations, as Britain, Germany, Italy.

The aim of the research is to highlight the key factors that sustained the shift from ocean liners to cruise ships. The paper will try to analyse in a comparative international perspective: the company strategies; innovation in technology and shipbuilding; marketing strategies; the role of the states; credit availability; increasing demand of tourism activities and leisure.