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Yes, A Gay Cruise Company Can Keep Guests Safe Amid a Pandemic

VACAYA LGBT+ Caribbean Cruise on Celebrity Millennium Successfully Completes 7-Night Voyage

Washington, D.C., January 17, 2022 - In an article published on Friday, January 14, 2022, The New York Times asked, "Can a Gay Cruise Keep 4700 Safe Amid Covid?" in reference to another gay travel company's charter cruise on Royal Caribbean embarking January 16, 2022. While VACAYA wasn't mentioned by name in the article, our January 10-17, 2022 Caribbean Cruise on Celebrity Millennium was referenced.

Having just wrapped this nearly 2000-passenger Caribbean Cruise, VACAYA can definitively answer that question... "Yes, with careful execution of recommended protocols, the LGBT+ community *can* safely navigate these incredibly challenging times."

VACAYA Co-Founder & CEO Randle Roper adds, "The venerated Times, whose article quoted several people not even traveling on either cruise, did not live up to the journalistic integrity we expect and was an affront to Atlantis Events, LGBT+ travel companies in general, *and* the gay community. This certainly wasn't news 'Fit to Print.' As we begin to come out of the pandemic, it's ok to ask questions about how, why, and when we'll return to normal, but The Times completely missed the story here. Their decision to focus on errant quotes taken from various social media pages to sensationalize the story was both a misfire and (let's hope unintentionally) homophobic. The focus *should* have been on the positive steps being taken by travel companies to adapt to live in a new world of testing, screening, and exposure reduction through contact tracing, upgraded onboard medical facilities and staff, and improved guest stateroom ventilation."

Roper continues, "Everyone aboard VACAYA's cruise on Celebrity Millennium has been vaccinated, most have been boosted, and all were tested shortly before boarding. Indoor masking policies remain in place. And despite the CDC's recent decision to make the cruise industry a villain, we applaud the industry's science-based efforts to mitigate risks."

In a recent statement by CLIA (Cruise Line International Association), "Cases identified on cruise ships consistently make up a very slim minority of the total population onboard – far fewer than on land – and the majority of those cases are asymptomatic or mild in nature, posing little to no burden on medical resources onboard or onshore."

Roper continues, “Humanity’s return to normal won’t be easy and there will undoubtedly be pitfalls along the way, but someone has to make the first moves. As the LGBT+ community has done since the dawn of time, we will lead the way back to some semblance of normalcy. Yes, we might do that covered in sequins and glitter, but we will boldly take the steps others are afraid to make. Remember, this isn’t our community’s first pandemic and most of us understand how to adapt to protocols.”

“VACAYA’s 2022 Caribbean Cruise on Celebrity Millennium was completely sold out, with nearly 2,000 guests scheduled to sail. With rigorous pre-sail protocols in place, several hundred passengers were ultimately unable to sail because of positive pre-cruise Covid test results. Most of those guests were well insured and have experienced minimal losses. The ship sailed successfully with 1,568 passengers aboard. Over the course of the week, 27 guests tested positive for Covid-19 and were placed in isolation and 72 additional guests who’d been in close contact with a positive person (which is defined as being within 6 feet for 15 minutes or longer) were tested, placed in quarantine for the recommended 24 hours, and re-tested before being declared Covid-free and released.”

“All in all, the pre-cruise, onboard, and post-cruise protocols have worked exactly as designed. And because of our adherence to those protocols, VACAYA and our strong LGBT+ community members have successfully taken those first bold steps back to normalcy.”

Patrick Gunn, VACAYA Co-Founder & CMO adds, “As entrepreneurs in the travel industry during a historic pandemic, we’re often asked, ‘how do you feel confident traveling with large numbers of guests to your events?’ Our answer is simple: we follow the science. The science led the CDC, CLIA, and cruise lines to develop health and safety protocols second to none. Our cruise is proof they work. As an additional proof point, VACAYA experienced no Covid cases at our October 2021 Mexico Resort vacation, which welcomed over 700 travelers. Historically, LGBT+ community members travel more than their heterosexual counterparts. The reason is simple: persecution in small hometowns drove LGBT+ community members to seek out havens in bigger cities and gay-friendly destinations around the world. As an example, VACAYA offers an environment where for one magical week, our community gets to be the majority and live life out loud in the blissful utopia VACAYA creates. That single change from being an always-minority to a sudden-majority can have a profoundly positive real-world effect on individuals. So our view is that we owe our travel-hungry guests the opportunity to travel safely.”

“Although the pandemic has been challenging, the human spirit is resilient. VACAYA has experienced a recent surge in bookings resulting in 4 out of 6 announced trips selling out in record time. VACAYA created the initiative #AdaptToLive to inspire guests to collectively come together to work through the various challenges everyone is facing so we could continue to live our lives.”

VACAYA guest William Onieal said, “As a registered nurse at the first hospital to receive Covid positive patients in New York, I was one of three people who at the height of the pandemic had the unenviable task of determining which patients would receive lifesaving resources and which

would not. As the pandemic progressed, my husband and I desperately needed to find something to look forward to and help us manage the additional stress that had been thrust upon our otherwise charmed lives. This VACAYA Caribbean cruise became the light at the end of the tunnel. As the cruise got closer, we never worried about not knowing what we needed to do to stay safe. VACAYA's and Celebrity Cruises' health and safety protocols helped us feel confident we could safely enjoy our vacation and our first respite from the pandemic."

VACAYA guests Brian and John, who held their wedding aboard VACAYA's Celebrity Millennium cruise this week said, "We postponed our wedding 3 times during the pandemic, so we were thrilled VACAYA and Celebrity didn't postpone the cruise again. We happily adopted VACAYA's adapt to live mantra that enabled us to finally tie the knot in front of friends and family onboard."

About VACAYA

VACAYA is the first and only large-scale adults-only vacation company on earth built exclusively for the entire LGBTQIAPK community. VACAYA charts entire ships and resorts so LGBT+ travelers have the freedom to express their individuality, make personal connections, celebrate life, rev up, or simply relax... together.

Additional details about VACAYA can be found on their website and social media. Press can stay up-to-date by visiting VACAYA online at <https://www.myVACAYA.com/>, on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/myvacaya>, on Instagram at <https://www.instagram.com/myvacaya/>, on TikTok at <https://www.tiktok.com/@myvacaya>, and on the VACAYA Press Center at <https://www.myvacaya.com/press-center/articles-press-releases/>, or by contacting Patrick Gunn, VACAYA Co-Founder & CMO.