

# Business Cruise Sets Sail to Explore a New Business Model for Efficient Maritime Social Platforms

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**Abstract:** In recent years, with the rapid development of the global cruise industry, business cruises have emerged as a new trend, attracting increasing attention from business elites. Zhongde Business Cruise, a pioneer in this field, has creatively introduced the concept of a "Cruise Business School". It integrates luxury cruise travel with mid-to-high-end business needs through an invitation and referral system, which has established a decentralized business social platform that combines learning, networking, and collaboration. This paper analyzes the development background, business model, market positioning, competitive advantages, and future prospects of business cruises, exploring their innovative impact on modern business interactions and their potential for global expansion.

**keywords:** business cruise, cruise business school, efficient networking, new business model, resource integration

## 1. Introduction

Traditionally positioned as a leisure and tourism industry, the cruise sector has undergone significant transformation in recent years. Zhongde Business Cruise's introduction of the "Cruise Business School" concept marks a paradigm shift, positioning cruise ships as dynamic hubs for career-driven individuals. Unlike conventional business events or traditional business schools, this model leverages luxury cruise travel to create an immersive, concentrated environment for learning, networking, and collaboration. By adopting a closed-loop participant selection process with invitation and referral, the program brings together professionals, entrepreneurs, and industry leaders to foster trust, precision connections, and partnerships. This study examines the current landscape, business model, and future potential of business cruises, highlighting their role in reshaping traditional business networking paradigms and driving diversified growth in the cruise industry.

## 2. Development Background of Business Cruises

Transformation of the Cruise Industry, the cruise industry's shift toward high-end, specialized services reflects growing competition in the leisure tourism sector. Business cruises exemplify this trend by catering to niche markets seeking tailored experiences.

Evolving Demand for Business Networking, while online interactions are convenient in the digital age, they often lack depth. High-net-worth individuals — particularly entrepreneurs and executives — increasingly value face-to-face engagement. Business cruises address this need by providing controlled, immersive environments conducive to building trust and fostering meaningful connections [1].

Rise of High-End Consumption, the rapid growth of high-net-worth populations in China and emerging global markets has fueled demand for premium business experiences. Cruise schools achieve exclusivity through rigorous participant screening, ensuring high-caliber networking opportunities and enhanced collaboration efficiency.

## 3. Business Model Analysis

On the morning of December 10, 2023, the inaugural voyage of the Zhongde Business Cruise was launched in collaboration with the Tianjin Cruise and Yacht Association. Onboard the MSC Splendida, over 2,000 industry professionals, 300 outstanding individuals from the "new three classes", 200 university alumni association heads, and 50 business luminaries embarked on a remarkable journey. The cruise featured a diverse array of forums and activities, including public welfare, technology, health, education, talent, and ESG. Topics ranged from in-depth discussions on AI and new productive forces to forward-looking talks on the future of education, high-quality development, and the silver economy, as well as exchanges on private boards, entrepreneurship, and cultural and artistic sharing. Each session served to stimulate participants' thinking and broaden their perspectives. The cruise offered a comprehensive program with over a thousand events, including hundreds of boutique courses covering entrepreneurship, economics, international relations, psychology, business etiquette, and family education. Additionally, there were over 200 all day and night lectures, spontaneous sharing sessions, more than 100 cross-

industry networking events, and over 30 hot-topic salons. These include the "New Three Classes Lecture Hall" and themed forums such as the Marine Science and Technology Forum, Marine Public Welfare Forum, Marine Education Forum, Marine Health Forum, Marine Talent Forum, and Marine ESG Forum. These activities enriched the overall experience and reinforce the cruise's reputation as a comprehensive platform for deep communication and collaborative development. The immersive social environment onboard the cruise accelerates trust-building and precise networking among the initial participants, known as "cruise guests". By eliminating digital distractions, the vast ocean setting facilitates deep interpersonal connections and accelerates the establishment of meaningful relationships [2]. The cruise featured a rich variety of cross-industry business activities, including keynote speeches, professional courses, roundtable discussions, themed social dinners, talent shows, and sports and entertainment. The successful conclusion of subsequent voyages, such as the one that returned on September 27, 2024, further validated the cruise's innovative approach to efficient business networking. The cruise's focused on creating a deep exchange and cooperation platform integrates learning, socializing, and collaboration into a unified framework. During the six-day, five-night voyage, participants engaged in unprecedented levels of deep communication, resource maintenance, and cooperated development alongside over 5,000 peers [3]. This immersive experience fostered a unique opportunity for meaningful interactions and collaborative ventures.

The cruise facilitated meaningful interactions among professionals from various industries, allowing them to rapidly accumulate valuable contacts that could take a year or even a lifetime to establish otherwise. It brought together industry pioneers, elite groups, and social pillars to experience a multi-centered business social platform that combined learning, networking, and collaboration.

**Target Audience:** The cruise primarily targets ambitious professionals aged 35 to 50. These individuals have a foundation but still seek room for growth. The goal of the Zuode Business School is to help them expand their networks, enhance their self-worth, and provide a reliable platform for interaction.

**Self-Actualization Value:** The cruise integrates luxury travel, executive education, and high-end business networking into a single platform. During the six-day, five-night cruise, participants can relax, expand their networks, and enhance their self-worth in a relatively enclosed environment.

**Trustworthiness:** The cruise leverages the unique characteristics of a cruise ship, such as a closed space and absence of mobile phone interference, to create a unique environment focused on business networking. Each participant is invited or recommended, ensuring no strangers are present, which helps establish deep connections in a short time.

**Differentiation from Traditional Business Meetings:** Unlike traditional conferences, the cruise school does not rely on a single organizer but allows each participant to become a node in a self-organizing business ecosystem. The cruise uses strict access mechanisms to ensure that all participants are business elites or industry leaders. This approach not only enhances the quality of networking but also increases the privacy and trustworthiness of the platform.

## 4. Core Marketing Advantages of the Cruise School

**Table 1. Comparative of Traditional Business Meetings and Business Cruises**

Dimension	Traditional Business Meetings	Business Cruise
Networking Depth	Shallow (1–2 days)	Deep (6 days/5 nights)
Participation	Open registration	Invitation + referral system
Setting	Fixed venues	Luxury cruise + mobile hub
Collaboration	Low efficiency (brief interactions)	High efficiency (long-term ties)

While traditional cruise models prioritize leisure and entertainment, business cruises emphasize the creation of commercial value. The conventional cruise business model integrates luxury accommodations, diverse dining options, a wide range of entertainment, and a multifaceted travel experience, essentially functioning as a "sea resort". Standard amenities include casinos, theaters, shopping malls, and water parks, catering to a broad spectrum of leisure activities. In contrast, the "Cruise Business School" targets business professionals who possess stronger spending power. Participants on business cruises gain access to a range of high-value offerings, including policy interpretations and economic trend analyses, insights into future business opportunities and industry landscapes, guidance on entrepreneurial directions and challenges, exploration of new forms and logics of corporate cooperation, and understanding of corporate social responsibility. These experiences facilitate effective networking across various sectors. As a result, the target audience is more precise, leading to higher per-customer spending and stronger repeat purchase rates.

Furthermore, business cruises leverage big data and manual screening to precisely match resources, thereby significantly

improving the success rate of business collaborations. This capability represents a significant advantage over traditional social methods, which often struggle to achieve such targeted and efficient matchmaking.

A key member of the business cruise community, Pu Wang, the founder of ALLPKU also known as Beida Zongheng, suggests that organizing representatives from three major societal business forces, such as 100 alumni association presidents, 100 chamber of commerce presidents, and 100 industry association presidents would be sufficient to propel the cruise business school forward. Pu Wang, one of the founders of the business cruise, has extended the cruise's business model offline by initiating the "Author Face-to-Face" public welfare reading project. This initiative aims to promote nationwide reading by inviting authors to share their works in person. Since its inception, the project has successfully held nearly 600 sessions, establishing a unique operational model that includes systems for recommenders, hosts, invitees, and spokespersons. Each event produces dedicated posters and videos, which are disseminated through public accounts and video platforms to enhance the impact of digital management.

In the era of widespread digital reading, the value of deep reading and face-to-face interaction becomes increasingly prominent. The "Author Face-to-Face" project, by inviting authors for offline sharing, establishes a long-term interactive platform connecting authors with readers. This initiative not only fills a historical gap in continuous author-sharing activities but also promotes a deeper level of reading engagement through systematic operational models. Currently focused on first- and second-tier cities, the project has the potential to expand into third- and fourth-tier cities and rural areas, thereby benefiting a wider range of regions.

The enthusiasm of numerous cruise participants for business activities extends beyond the voyage itself. Currently, every Thursday evening from 8:00 to 10:00 PM, the official WeChat account of Zhongde Business Cruise hosts live broadcasts featuring two alumni representatives. These individuals share their "secrets to success" and "life philosophies" with viewers through online platforms. The content is diverse and covers a wide range of industries, including discussions on the future prospects of digital technology, strategic planning for businesses, research on AI empowering super-individuals, exploration of future urban public services, sharing of medical and health knowledge, reflections on the future development of the tourism industry, stories of educational journeys for youth in remote mountainous areas, discussions on psychological expertise, research on dance and sports, and sharing of quality education scholarship projects. After each interview, the essence of the content is edited into written versions and combined with videos to create a comprehensive introduction of the alumni, generating sustained high-quality influence. Multiple alumni have already shared their projects and experiences, and future activities are planned to continue this engagement.

## 5. Challenges and Risks

The development of business cruises faces several challenges and risks. Firstly, the high operating costs associated with luxury cruise ships necessitate a stable base of high-end customers to ensure profitability. Secondly, safety concerns related to maritime travel cannot be overlooked, as natural disasters and outbreaks of infectious diseases can disrupt cruise operations. Thirdly, the uncertainty of the global economy poses a significant challenge to the cruise market. With increasing competition in the market, more enterprises and capital are entering the cruise industry, making it essential to stand out by offering differentiated services and products. Maintaining uniqueness and relevance is crucial for sustained success in this competitive landscape.

## 6. Global Market Potential

According to the 2023 Cruise Industry Status Report by the International Cruise Association, the cruise tourism industry has maintained an average annual growth rate of 8% in recent years, with projections indicating that the number of cruise passengers worldwide will reach 39.5 million by 2027. Data shows that the Chinese cruise market performed well in the first half of 2024, with 23 cruise ships operating 206 voyages [4]. The future vision for the Zhongde Business Cruise is to establish a closed-loop business ecosystem that integrates consumers, investors, entrepreneurs, and disseminators. This ecosystem facilitates a seamless transition from identifying initial seed users on the cruise to attracting angel investors, securing funding, and assembling entrepreneurial teams. In the Asian market, emerging economies such as Singapore exhibit strong demand for high-end business networking. Similarly, in the European and American markets, mature business communities have a high acceptance of closed-loop social interactions, indicating a broad market potential.

In the future, business cruises can further enhance the precision and security of social interactions by incorporating advanced technologies such as AI matching systems and blockchain identity authentication. These innovations can improve the accuracy of networking and the safety of interactions. Additionally, business cruises can offer exclusive programs tailored for corporate executive teams, collaborating with business schools and investment institutions to develop more specialized

learning content. Consequently, the global market for business cruises holds significant potential.

Zhongde Business Cruise plans to construct the world's largest 189,800-ton business cruise within the next three to five years, aiming to create a true "business cruise moat" that belongs to the Chinese. This ambitious endeavor will undoubtedly further solidify Zhongde Business Cruise's position in the industry, establishing it as a true leader in the field of business cruises.

## 7. Conclusion

As a new format within the cruise industry, business cruises redefine high-end business networking through the "Cruise Business School" model. The immersive and enclosed social environment of these cruises effectively enhances the trust and efficiency of business collaborations, offering a broad market outlook. In the future, with the growth in global demand for high-end business services, business cruises are poised to become a significant growth point in the cruise industry. They promise to bring revolutionary changes to traditional business networking practices.

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