Singapourians’ views split on safety of cruises to nowhere

Some cite lack of confidence in safety rules, others say they are nice getaway option

ONLY OPTION NOW
I have never been on a cruise before, so I would rather fly, but now that I have no choice, I will take whatever option I can get.

DATA ENGINEER THEO KIM TING

UNSURE OF SAFETY
Even with half the number of guests, you are still going to have hundreds of people eating at the same time. There are still a lot of unknowns, and with many people being confined in the same space—I am not sure it is a good idea.

DR LEONG, General Practitioner

Ng Wei Kai

People have clearly split views about whether it is safe to go on an upcoming cruise to nowhere that have received the official nod. An online poll of more than 1,000 Straits Times readers showed that 39 per cent gave cruises a thumbs up, and 40 per cent, the thumbs down. The survey revealed a lack of confidence about the safety measures in place against the coronavirus, while the enthusiasts say it is a welcome getaway at a time when other forms of travel are not an option.

Dr Gangjee Thang Kai Ting, 24, sees it as the only way to enjoy a sense of “getting away”. “I have never been on a cruise pre-Covid-19 because I would rather fly, but now that I have no choice, I will take whatever option is available.”

A general practitioner, who wanted to be known only as Dr Lian, 39, cited the difficulty of coordinating and managing activities such as meals.

“Even with half of the number of guests, you are still going to have hundreds of people eating at the same time,” he added. “There are still a lot of unknowns, and with many people in a confined space—I am not sure it is a good idea.”

They were commenting on the go-ahead that Genting Cruise Lines and Royal Caribbean International have received from the authorities to offer cruises to nowhere from Singapore. But they have to follow a strict set of guidelines to prevent on-board spread of the virus.

“People have created many safety measures for the cruise lines, and the authorities have ensured there is no risk of transmission,” he said. The measures include not allowing more than 150 passengers on board at any one time, and the crew are also tested and screened.

“There will be a lot of unknowns, and with many people in a confined space—I am not sure it is a good idea.”

The Diamond Princess which docked in Yokohama with about 3,700 people who were quarantined on board. More than 700 of them were infected. Some experts noted the Singapore Tourism Board’s new safety measures for the cruise lines are stricter than those for other attractions that are open here.

“The safety measures are more stringent than what is required for hotels offering staycations,” said Professor Jerry Lim, director of the Leadership Institute for Global Health at National University of Singapore’s Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health. Given the very low community prevalence of the virus and the re-introduction of a negative test before boarding, the risk of an infection is low, Prof Lim said.

“Also, while cruising, passengers will need to maintain public health measures such as wearing masks and being socially distant, moves that will further reduce the risk of transmission,” he added. Still, some, like Madam Jolie Too, who is self-employed in the shipping business, are still wary.

“My heart’s not in it. I am not a big fan of cruises, but without Covid-19 around, I would not mind going,” she said. “However, I just don’t think it is safe to be stuck on a boat with the same people for a few days.”

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