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**PAUL GAUGUIN CRUISES WINS *TRAVEL + LEISURE* SMITTYS AWARD FOR SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN**

*“Best Single Social Media Promotion” in Cruise Line Category With “Meet Me in Tahiti” Campaign*

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**BELLEVUE, WASH. – June 12, 2012** – **Paul Gauguin Cruises** ([www.pgcruises.com](http://www.pgcruises.com)), operator of the highest-rated and longest continually sailing luxury cruise ship in the South Pacific, the m/s *Paul Gauguin*, won a *Travel + Leisure* Social Media in Travel and Tourism [(SMITTYS)](http://www.travelandleisure.com/travel-blog/carry-on/2012/1/24/announcing-the-smittys-tls-social-media-in-travel-and-tourism-awards) Award in the cruise line category for “Best Single Social Media Promotion” for its “Meet Me in Tahiti” campaign.

The inaugural *Travel + Leisure* SMITTYS honor and acknowledge those in the travel industry including hotels, resorts, cruise lines, airlines, airports, tour operators, tourism boards/convention and visitor bureaus, online travel agencies, and attractions who are doing an exceptional job on social media platforms or producing innovative social media campaigns.

Nominations were accepted between January 20 and March 2, 2012, and winners were selected by an independent panel of social media experts. The award winners were celebrated at the *Travel + Leisure* SMITTYS event, held on Thursday, June 7, 2012, in Brooklyn, New York. The full list of SMITTYS winners is available at [www.travelandleisure.com/smittys](http://www.travelandleisure.com/smittys) and in the July issue of *Travel + Leisure*, on newsstands June 22, 2012.

Paul Gauguin Cruises partnered with social media agency Banyan Branch to design and implement the successful “Meet Me in Tahiti” campaign, a Facebook-integrated microsite, creating an innovative way to reach new markets and create awareness and excitement for Tahiti and French Polynesia. The campaign gave users the opportunity to take a virtual vacation in five minutes without leaving their desks by visiting [www.MeetMeinTahiti.com](http://www.MeetMeinTahiti.com). Users selected three Facebook friends to accompany them on their visit to paradise, creating custom postcards enjoying exciting activities such as kayaking in a lagoon, snorkeling with sting rays, riding on off-road jeep safaris, or relaxing on a private beach. Users could then post their postcards to Facebook directly from the site for all to see.

Thirty percent of “Meet Me in Tahiti” site’s traffic resulted from shared links like those on Facebook and Twitter – well above the average website, which only sees roughly 10 percent of traffic from shared links. Interest in Tahiti as a vacation destination increased due to the campaign’s innovative use of Facebook Places, allowing users to check in to Tahiti and feature their virtual vacation on their Facebook wall. The campaign was also featured in major travel publications and blogs.

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**About Banyan Branch**

Banyan Branch, based in Seattle, Wash., is a full-service social media agency that provides end-to-end marketing services including strategy, creative, execution and analytics. With a holistic approach that integrates Strategy, Social Media Creative, Engagement and Research & Analytics, Banyan Branch delivers social media programs unmatched by smaller agencies, while providing more personalized service and quicker response than large-scale digital firms. Dozens of the world’s leading brands, including FOX, Viacom, Paramount, Hartz, Univision, Gilt Groupe, and Microsoft have partnered with Banyan Branch to implement a wide variety of social media campaigns. For more information on Banyan Branch visit [www.BanyanBranch.com](http://www.BanyanBranch.com).

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**About Paul Gauguin Cruises**

Owned by Pacific Beachcomber S.C., French Polynesia’s leading luxury hotel and cruise operator, Paul Gauguin Cruises operates the 5+-star cruise ship m/s *Paul Gauguin*, providing a deluxe cruise experience tailored to the unparalleled wonders of Tahiti, French Polynesia, and the South Pacific. *The Gauguin* was built at the Chantiers de l’Atlantique shipyard in Saint Nazaire, France. The ship, 513 feet long and 71 feet wide, has a draft of 16.9 feet, and can accommodate 332 guests with a staff of 217. It is one of the top Exclusive Charter and Incentive Group venues in the industry and has completed more than 570 South Pacific cruises, serving more than 176,250 guests, including more than 15,000 honeymooners, since its inaugural sail in 1998. *The Gauguin* has undergone more than $25 million in enhancements, with an additional $7 million completed in January 2012. *The Gauguin* has been impressively named the 2011 Silver Magellan Award Winner in the Small Cruise Ship category by *Travel Weekly* andwas recognized as one of the “Top 20 Small Cruise Ships” by readers of *Condé Nast Traveler* in 2012.

The cruise line’s second ship, the m/v *Tere Moana*, will begin sailing under the Paul Gauguin Cruises’ banner in December 2012 after completing a multifaceted renovation. The ship, which will sail Europe, the Caribbean, and Latin America, is 330 feet long and 46 feet wide, has a draft of 11.5 feet, and can accommodate 90 guests with a staff of 54.

For additional information on Paul Gauguin Cruises, please visit [www.pgcruises.com](http://www.pgcruises.com).

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