

MARINE ELECTRONICS & COMMUNICATIONS

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Onboard pre-paid roaming to meet crew requirements

Florida-based Wireless Maritime Service (WMS) has launched a new telephony service – known as Crewzfone – aimed specifically at crewmembers, allowing them to use their own mobile phones to make and receive calls and use text messaging from ships at sea.

WMS vice president Rob Marjerison told *MEC*: “Since the introduction of cell phones to the market three years ago, today nearly every cruise line offers some form of service and those that do not are planning to commence so shortly. CrewzFone differs from conventional services in two ways: access and rates.”

Until now access on ships has been limited to users who have international roaming service through their home carriers. However, the majority of crewmembers prefer pre-paid mobile services purchased either in their home country or in ports of call.

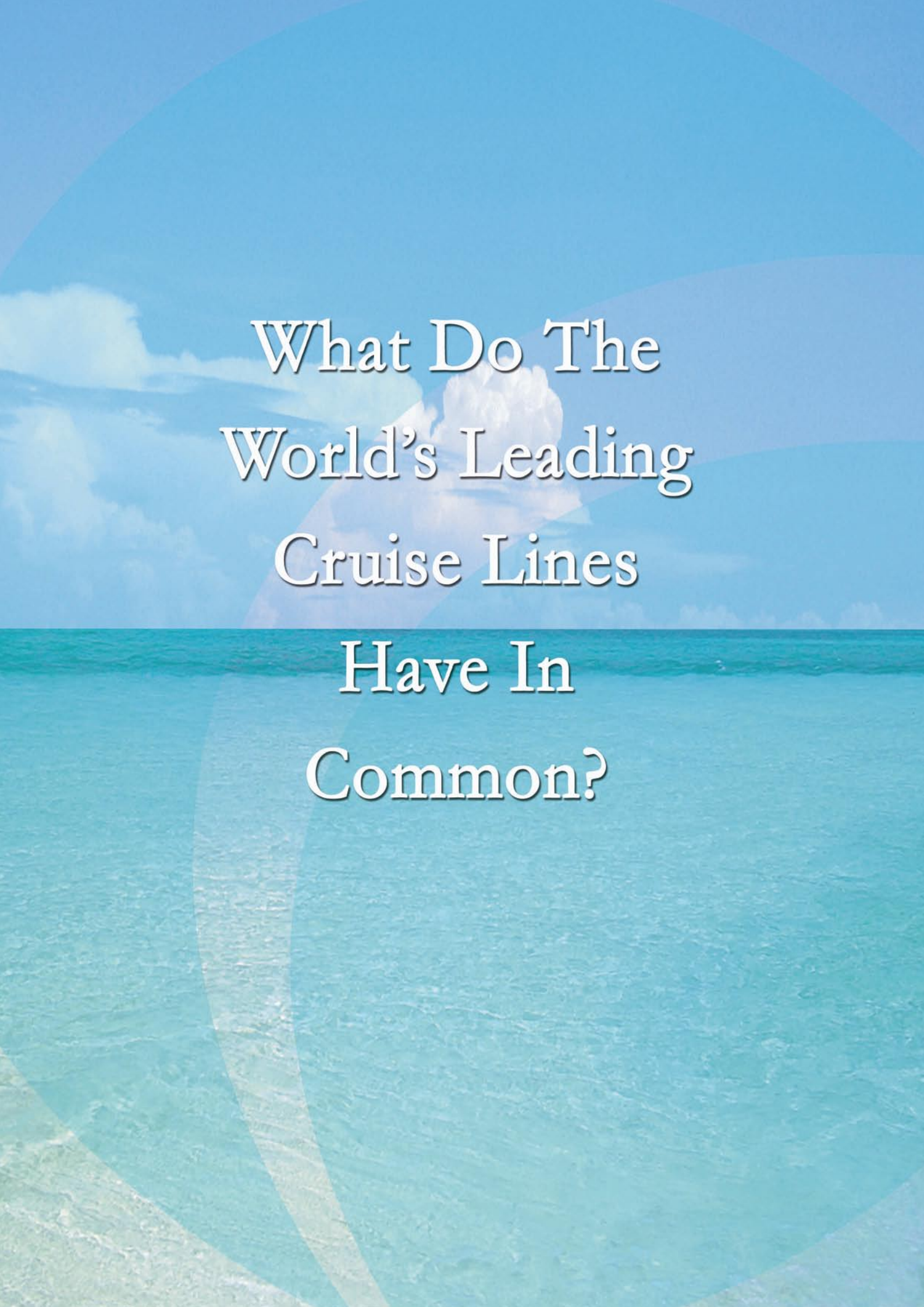
While there are emerging standards that

support international roaming for pre-paid users, maritime roaming is still the exception, not the rule. Furthermore Mr Marjerison believes that rates for maritime roaming (typically US\$2.50-3.00 per minute) may be acceptable for passengers who cruise once or twice a year but are not palatable for crewmembers who work contracts of 6-10 months at time.

To use CrewzFone, crewmembers make a one time purchase of a pre-paid SIM card (which includes a phone number) from a vending machine onboard the ship. After inserting it into their handset, they can then place and receive calls and text message at special rates, which, according to WMS, are competitive with what is offered shoreside.

A particular advantage is that because the service sends users a text message with their new balance at the end of each call made crew can manage their budget easily. When handset credit is running low, topping up their account can be done from the same vending machine. **MEC**





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