Linux Lunacy, Perl Whirl, MySQL Swell: Open Source technologists on board

When Geeks Cruise

If you are on one of those huge cruising ships and, instead of middle-aged ladies sipping cocktails, you spot a bunch of T-shirt touting, nerdy looking guys hacking on their notebooks in the lounges, chances are you are witnessing a "Geek Cruise". **BY ULRICH WOLF**

Neil Baumann, of Palo Alto, California, has been organizing geek cruises since 1999 (*http://www.geekcruises.com/)*, Neil always finds enough open source and programming celebrities to hold sessions on Linux, Perl, PHP and other topics dear to geeks.

Open Source Celebs on the Med

I was lucky enough to get on board the first Geek Cruise on the Mediterranean, scaring the nerds to death with my "press" badge. This was a one week trip in October, from Venice to Istanbul and back; an action-packed journey with sessions on Linux file systems, Samba, PHP, Perl, and MySQL.

Guests benefited from the collective wisdom of file system guru Ted T'so, Samba core team member Chris Hertel, and PHP inventor Rasmus Lerdorf, just to name a few. The Perl gang had the most impressive turn out, with Larry Wall himself, Allison Randal, the President of the Perl Foundation and Perl 6 Project Manager, as well as Randall Schwartz, renowned for his instructive and amusing books and articles on Perl.

Casey West's talks on developing Web applications with Perl and test driven development turned out to be a genuine treasure trove of information thanks to the sheer bulk of general considerations and practical tips on application development – not only for Perl developers but for anyone interested in programming.

Perl: Present and (Distant?) Future

In contrast, Allison Randal's tutorials on Parrot Assembler and Perl6 features were hardcore. Thank goodness Larry Wall summed up all the major details on Perl6 in a brilliant lecture that was rich with metaphors and bursting with information. That is, Larry gave us all the major details, apart from the answer to the 64 thousand dollar question: When is the final release date?

In fact, Larry flatly refused to comment. Although Allison Randal waxed optimistic at the fringe of the conference, "Maybe within 12 months," Randall Schwartz estimated at least twice that time.

The twelve MySQL Sessions also attracted a lot of attention, and this was hardly surprising with the MySQL founders, Michael "Monty" Widenius and David Axmark personally headlining the sessions. On the subject of the past and future of the database system in general, Brian Aker and Monty Widenius delved the depths of the MySQL source code and gave administrators a crash course in database optimization or high-availability clustering.

The dedicated Linux track comprised a meager spattering of six lectures, and though there was something to suit everyone's taste, the whole thing tended to lack detail. Ted T'so spent a long time talking about the Ext2 and Ext3 file systems, criticizing ReiserFS along the way, but had very little to say about network file systems, an increasingly vital topic. Developers were treated to a lecture on developing shared libraries, and admins enjoyed sessions on Samba and heterogeneous networks.

Am Geek, Will Travel

If you would like to meet the celebrities from various projects in a relaxed atmosphere and are not intimidated by the price starting at US$ 1,300 or EUR 1,200 for the cruise (or less, depending on the geographical region and the size of the ship), plus US$ 1,000 or EUR 900 for the sessions, a Geek Cruise may be exactly what you are looking for.

Perl and MySQL experts got their money's worth from the shipboard sessions, although the Linux sesssions lacked depth. Of course, you could always concentrate on taking in the tourist attractions. The Mediterranean cruise offered excursions to Istanbul or the ruins of ancient Olympia. This may sound more like Greek culture than Geek Culture, but hey, at least it's culture. ■
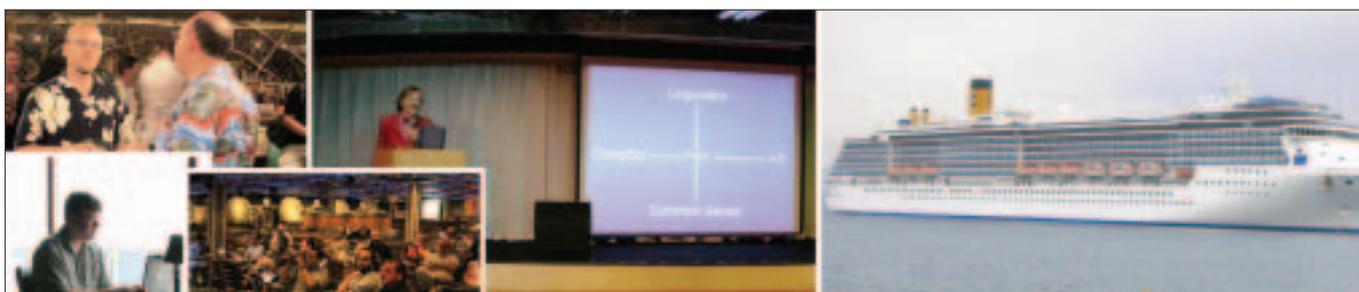
Figure 1: A geek cruise is a great place to learn, relax, network and meet the experts, like Rasmus Lerdorf (top left), Ted T'so (below) or Larry Wall (center).