



## Cruises

Taking a cruise is the best way to see several cities or countries in a short period of time, while enjoying an abundance of great food, viewing mildly good entertainment, and having your choice of dozens of land and sea excursions. The first cruise is generally the toughest to book because you may fear getting sea-sick or you may have a general fear of the unknown. Whatever the case, if you have the money and want a truly enjoyable vacation, a cruise is almost unbeatable.

If this is your first cruise I recommend booking a cabin on a better known cruise company, such as Royal Caribbean or Carnival Cruise Lines, and do a little research online by going to their sites (links are in the "Travel Link" section of the GlobeRogue site). This will help you narrow down the number of places you want to visit and give you a rough estimate on the cost of the trip. Once you're armed with a little knowledge you can then head down to a travel agent and let them book it for you. Sometimes a travel agent can get you a little better price or give you that little piece of information that you wished you'd had if you booked it yourself online. Even after six cruises I sometimes book through a travel agent.

There are really two types of costs when you book a cruise, upfront costs and hidden costs. The upfront costs include your airfare or car-fare to the port, and the cabin fee while on the ship. You can figure out your airfare or car-fare and I'll concentrate on the cabin fee.

Concerning cabins, there is a big price range depending on where your cabin is located, from a bunk-bed cabin in the bowels of the ship, to a stateroom on the top level of the ship. But generally I expect to pay \$100 a day per person, which gives us a room with a view around the mid-ship level. Included in this price is all the food you care to eat, some activities like ping-pong and playing at the pool, as well as iced-tea or milk with your meals.

The hidden costs, if you aren't careful, can easily add up to more than what you paid for the cost of the cabin. These costs include transfers to and from the ship (\$30-\$100) alcoholic drinks (\$5-7 each), carbonated drinks (you can buy a card for about \$30 on a 7 day cruise), excursions (\$25-\$200 each excursion per person), photographs (\$0-\$200), t-shirts and other things you must have (\$0-\$200), and tips (\$10 a day per person). Not to mention the money for bingo, the money you spend at the casino, laundry fees, or whatever other services you use. I usually spend about \$300 more than I think I did, so watch out. But in the end, the price is forgotten long before the memories of the good times fade.

Packing for a cruise is a little different than most vacations because you need a larger variety of clothing. Formal wear for two dinners, semi-formal for 4 dinners, shorts pants, swimsuits, shorts, jeans, etc., so the bags can really start to add up. Try to get it all your clothes in one suitcase, one suit bag, and one small carryon, per person. Bringing anymore on board will only crowd your cabin and make you miserable when have to drag it around.

Let's say you've just booked your cruise and you have your airfare or car trip planned out, now what? In a few days to a few weeks you will receive some documents in the mail. The documents will include your cabin location, dining arrangements (late or early – I like early dining and I also like to be at a big table so I can meet new people – this can be set up with your travel agent), disclaimers, and your itinerary. It helps to read through the packet for the information and it gets you excited about the trip.

Once you've read the information you may be required to go online to answer a few questions and agree to a few things. You will enter a couple of codes listed in your packet and then enter the requested information. Nothing to get worked up about.

The day has finally arrived and you've made it to the dock area and you need to park your car. If you have some extra time, you can park in non-cruise ship parking for a little less money. They will offer a shuttle to and from the ship and carry your bags. On the other hand if you are running behind, you can drop off your bags near the ship and use the cruise ship parking. After you park your car you will approach the cruise terminal and can expect to see hundreds of smiling people giving their luggage to porters, who in turn place the luggage in bins. This luggage will be delivered to your cabin later in the day.

As you enter the terminal building you will go through the embarkation process. You will receive a key for your cabin/onboard charge card, go through dining arrangements, ensure you have a photo ID and birth certificate or passport (your travel agent should have told you which documents you need to bring along), get a photo taken to verify who you are coming and going to and from the ship, and finally take a photo of you entering the ship so you can see how greasy you look from standing in line.

Depending on how early you arrive, you may be able to catch a snack at one of the designated dining areas. And if you were smart enough to wear your swimsuit under your cloths or bring it along, you can jump in the pool. Usually I head to the cabin to check that out and relax for a few minutes, walk around the ship to get oriented, and then decide on what excursions to take.

In your room you will usually find the ship's newsletter and another pamphlet with all the ship's excursions. My girlfriend usually picks her favorite and I pick mine. This gives us both something to look forward to in the upcoming days. Warning\*\*\* some excursions fill up quickly, that's why we pick them on the first day and return the pamphlet to the purser's office. On the forms you will be able to make first and second choices, in case your first choice is full, but if you get them in early there isn't a problem. But if you want to wait and are flexible with what you do or see, then you can book an excursion any time you want.

One more item about excursions. You may be able to book them prior to cruising, I don't recommend it just because I've read about people who have had problems getting refunds for cancelled excursions. So it is probably better to wait until you are on the ship.

A note about the cabin, you may notice when you get to your cabin that it is rather small and that you won't be taking a bath for the next week because there is only a shower. You will also be amazed how the toilet flushes – I've always been tempted to flush the toilet while sitting on it, but have never been brave enough to try it. If you want to try it and survive, let me know how it goes.

When it is time to leave the dock you can go to the top decks and wave good-bye to some people you don't know or walk around and check out some more of the ship. But within the hour you will have to go to your room to get your life jacket on for the muster formation. This is the low point of the cruise. Everyone trudges to their designated muster areas, they are listed in your cabin, with their life jackets on. For fun I'll blow the whistle, but like I said, it's the low point, but luckily it only takes about half an hour.

After returning to your room it will probably be getting close to dinner time. If you didn't pig-out at the buffet earlier you should be plenty hungry by now. The first night is usually casual dress because you may not have received your luggage yet. So all you have to do is show up at your designated time (check your ship's newsletter for early and late dining times – they change sometimes day-to-day). On most cruise lines you will sit at the same table and enjoy the company of the same people and wait-staff most nights. Some cruise lines have gone to open seating, which I don't care for as much because you can form some good friendships after a week of eating and spending time together.

The nice thing about the dining room is, if you don't like what you've chosen or want seconds of something, it isn't a problem. Three desserts, no problem, want another lobster tail, just let the

wait staff know and they will bring it to you. There will always be some disappointments concerning the food, but you will almost always find something you like on the menu.

After dinner you will be able to attend a show in one of several showrooms, get a drink at the piano bar, strike it rich in the casino, or just walk around the deck and feel the breeze rush through your hair. I'm not big on the shows (and sometimes they replay them on the ship's TV the next day anyway), so my girlfriend and I usually take a stroll and head back to the room. There we find our beds have been turned down, a chocolate on the pillow, and usually a towel animal (a Stingray, elephant, etc. made from a towel) waiting to greet us.

One night of the cruise we may save room for the midnight buffet – a beautiful feast with ice sculptures and beautifully decorated tables. We usually wait for the dessert buffet, but there are 7 to choose from.

After a good night's sleep I like to hit the workout room to run a few miles and lift weights (this will cut the 7-10 lbs you would gain down to 3-5 lbs). They also have aerobic, yoga, and other such things or you can join the ship's fitness plan where you get points for working out.

Here are a few more things.

- Windows are great to see out of, but you can sleep better without one.
- Tips are for the cabin steward, waiter, bus person, and head waiter.
- July thru October is hurricane season in the Caribbean.
- Anything less than a 5 day cruise seems very short, 7 to 10 days is the best.
- Summers and holidays kids are out of school and on the ship.
- Telephone and Internet service is available onboard, but are a little pricey.
- Cell phones usually don't work.
- Wearing a sea-sick patch behind your ear makes you look like a fool – take a pill.
- For non-formal dinners men usually wear Dockers and women usually wear slacks or light dresses.
- There is a doctor on board with plenty of free sea-sick medicine.
- The best place to have you cabin to avoid sea-sickness is mid-ship, mid-level.
- 110 volt outlets are available in the room.
- Some people bring soda or water with them, it's hassle to me, but you can save money.
- On a 7 day cruise there are usually two formal nights, about 5% of men wear a tux and 90% wear a suit, and for women 90% wear a dress.
- Then entire cruise can be ruined if you get sun burned the first day.

The rest of your stay is up to you. Between the excursions, the great meals, time at the pool and the variety of other things to do – including relaxing – before you know it, you will be back in your home port. The last thing you will need to know about is the debarkation process. The final night of your cruise you will have to put your luggage in the hallway, with exception of your carry-ons, and it will be taken to luggage land to be claimed after you leave the ship. To leave ship, each level is given a debarkation time and you are expected to meet in a designated area at your respective times. If you have an early flight, you can let the purser know and you can get off the ship in the first wave. Otherwise, just walk around one last time, do a little people watching, and enjoy one last cheeseburger.

Here are some general ratings for most the cruise lines. Please remember this is only a guide and a newer and larger ship on a lower rated cruise line will probably be better than an old small ship on a higher rated cruise line.

### **Superior**

Crystal Cruises  
Holland America Line  
Peter Deilmann Cruises  
Princess Cruises  
Radisson Seven Seas Cruises  
Seabourn Cruise Line  
Silversea Cruises  
Windstar Cruises

### **Excellent**

Celebrity Cruises  
Costa Cruise Line  
Cunard Line  
Royal Olympic Cruises

### **Very Good**

Carnival Cruises  
Disney Cruise Line  
Norwegian Cruise Line  
Orient Line  
Royal Caribbean International

### **Good**

Olsen Cruise Lines  
World Explorer Cruises