



Guide to Cruising

*join the **smartest** cruise
passengers in the world*



A Quick Welcome From The Author!

First of all, I would like to thank you for ordering this product. Our main goal with the Intelligent Cruiser is to help you save a great deal of money AND enjoy a great deal of vacation-transforming benefits on your next cruise and every cruise you ever take again.

Without this information, the chances are high that you will pay far too much for and during your cruise vacations. We believe that, as a consumer, you have a right to be in control of how you spend your money. And this is why we have created this guide.

As a cruise passenger, you will now be able to hold on to money that you otherwise would have needlessly spent. After reading this guide, you'll know exactly how the cruise industry works and exactly how to beat them at their own game.

Enjoy!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

(simply click on the page number to be taken directly to a particular chapter)

<u>CONTENTS</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Ultimate Cruise Savings Guide	<u>4</u>
Spoil Yourself With VIP Treatment	<u>26</u>
Truth Exposed!	<u>39</u>
Bonus Reports -including <i>How To Get A Free Cabin Upgrade, How To Lower Your Cruise Fare, The Master Packing List & more...</i>	<u>62</u>

Ultimate Cruise Savings Guide



THE SINGLE BIGGEST MISTAKE

Let's get right to it. Here is the single biggest mistake that cruise ship passengers make:

SPENDING TOO MUCH MONEY

I am not talking about the amount of money you pay to book your cruise. These cruise fares are actually at their lowest levels in a long time.

The mistake that I am referring to above is actually quite simple. Cruise ship passengers tend to become caught in a trap in which they believe that the more money they spend during their cruise, the higher the quality of their vacation.

The cruise lines are extremely skillful at convincing people to spend large amounts of money for goods and services in order to enhance their vacation. They are very successful at hiding the fact that almost everything you pay for on board (and even in port), could easily be had for much less money. Without any thought, passengers routinely accept the idea that they have no choice but to pay such high prices for such things as bar drinks, dinner wines, shore excursions, shop purchases, spa treatments, etc.

Senior officers are constantly in meetings, conference calls with the head office are often made, emails flood the inbox of every manager and new initiatives are constantly put into place – all in order to improve the methods for taking passengers' money as efficiently, subtly and repeatedly as possible.

In the end, a cruise ship is a business just like any other. However, that doesn't mean that you are helpless against their power and tactics. You have the right to be an educated consumer, and by doing so, make decisions that offer you the best solution and value. The cruise lines will do their best to convince you to do as little thinking as possible and to just spend your money without care. But once you learn how the system works, you will understand how even a slight change in the way you approach your cruise vacation can lead to immediate savings and benefits.

Cruise lines offer shiny brochures and websites that cause you to start dreaming about hot stone massages, pristine rainforests and white sand beaches, lobster dinners and high-end wines, personal and attentive service, saunas and steam rooms, duty-free purchases, late night parties and more. The idea is to get you so excited that you don't care how much any of those things actually cost once your vacation has started - you'll be willing to pay no matter what!

However, by learning a few simple methods, you can avoid falling victim to this trap and still get to do absolutely everything you want (whether on board or in the ports of call). You can outsmart the powerful machine!

You will no longer throw money away for goods and services that fail to add any real benefit to your cruise. If you pay hundreds or thousands more dollars for the best cabin on the ship, think about what you are paying for. Apart from having a marginally nicer room (which you are not going to be spending much time in anyway), almost every other attractive bonus that is often associated with a more expensive class of cabin can be had without paying much money at all.

Forget about paying for a butler – I am going to show you some tricks that will get you the same level of service for practically free! Similarly, there are easy ways to get those free bottles of wine and champagne, free nightly hors d' oeuvres, private massages and priority status, no matter what class of cabin you book. Before you continue reading, try to put yourself in the mind frame of focusing on **VALUE** over **COSTS**.

Enjoying the perfect cruise vacation has absolutely nothing to do with how much money you spend! Read that sentence again, write it down and memorize it. These words are the foundation of what you are about to learn.

HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS

Here are some words that were recently overheard at a major cruise industry trade show and conference: "We've built too many ships and we now have too many cabins to fill. We have no choice but to lower the cruise fares drastically. We will then increase the prices for most things on board in order to re-capture that lost revenue." Interesting.

Cruise lines rode the wave of the cruising boom by making plans to build an incredible number of new ships during the first decade of the 21st century. As we all know, the economy soon began faltering and people all over the country were suddenly unable to afford a cruise vacation. Unfortunately for the cruise lines, they had already entered into contracts to build dozens of new mega-ships, the largest and most expensive cruise ships ever seen. They found themselves stuck in a tough situation, but in the end, had no choice but to maintain the energetic pace of building new ships. The cruise lines realized that they had to continue building or else they would risk losing their reputation and share of the market.

The result of this ship-building race has been the abundance of cabins mentioned above and cruise fares that are as cheap as they have ever been. At first, this might appear to be excellent news for the general consumer interested in taking a cruise vacation. It may truly appear that you can easily get a high-quality 'bargain cruise.'

But unfortunately, this is just not true. Although "bargain cruises" are certainly advertised everywhere, they simply don't exist. In actuality, the lower the cruise fare, the more money you will be convinced to spend on board, either through direct or subtle means.

So when you find some incredible deal, such as \$300 per person for a 5-night Caribbean voyage, just remember that your spending will not end there. You can usually expect the total cost of a cruise vacation to be 3 times the amount of the cruise fare. Often times, the total cost is even more.

Here's the reason for that. When the cruise lines do offer such low cruise fares, they are doing so simply to get people onto their ships. They will charge whatever it takes to fill up all those available cabins and make sure that every ship is completely full when it sets sail.

However, once the ship does set sail, the focus of the cruise line is much different. They are now in a situation where they must make up for that lost revenue (which they lose by charging well below the normal rates for a cabin) in any way they can. Now that you are on board the ship, they are going to come after you any way they can, all with one main goal – getting you to spend as much of your money as possible.

As a result, prices for everything on board a ship - shore excursions, alcoholic drinks, specialty restaurants, spa treatments, on board shop purchases and more - are increased. And not only are the prices increased, but the tactics used to get you to pay these higher prices also become more clever, intense and sophisticated. Just take a look at your final cruise bill...you can sometimes find extra charges all over the place, ranging from tax on purchases made while the ship was not in international waters, various surcharges, automatic gratuities and even 'service fees' on some cruise lines. It is always a good idea to ask for clarification if you find any charges on your final bill that you don't recognize or understand.

The idea is to avoid falling into the traps set by the cruise lines that are designed to get back all of the money you saved by booking such a low cruise fare. This is not easy to do given that cruise lines are very successful in making up for that lost revenue. In my experience, there is rarely a voyage when a ship does not exceed the revenue goals that the cruise line had set. And these revenue goals are often set well in advance of a voyage, sometimes 1 year in advance, so they are not influenced by the fluctuations in cruise fares. Imagine that, the cruise lines are still able to get the same exact money out of you while on board even when the cruise fares are at their lowest levels ever. So don't be tricked into thinking that you are about to take a bargain cruise just because of your \$300 cruise fare.

Ok, that's the bad news. But here's the great news!

Once you have read this book in its entirety, you are certainly going to be in a much better position to beat the cruise lines at their own game and not be enticed to spend more money than you absolutely have to. Incredible-value cruise vacations can certainly be had and all it takes is some insider knowledge so that you can take advantage of everything that a cruise has to offer without having to take out a major loan.

Consider the following quick examples of ways to reduce the impact of the price increases.

(More detailed information will be provided throughout this package.)

Alcohol: It is often more economical to bring your own wine to dinner and pay the corkage fee instead of buying low-end wines at high-end prices from the cruise ship. You could also fill your wine glass in your cabin and bring it with you to your meal. Alternatively, a water bottle full of your favorite gin or vodka is one way to get your preferred drink on board at no extra cost. **However, just keep in mind that you do run the risk of having your liquor confiscated if you do give it a try. The good news is that some cruise lines, such as Carnival, now allow passengers to bring one or two bottles of wine on board per person. Check your cruise details to see if you're allowed to do that same.*

Duty-Free Purchases: Be patient and wait for the on board sales. By waiting a day or two, you can purchase the gifts, souvenirs and jewelry that have caught your attention, at a much more affordable price. If you have purchased something during the cruise and then find that it is on sale for a lower price later on, head back to the shops to have the price you paid adjusted. If they do not agree to do this, simply return the item and buy it back again at the sale price. See the report: "Forget about Costs – You Want Value!" for more details.

Shore Excursions: As cruise lines become hard pressed to increase their revenue, they have begun forcing local tour operators to offer their tour services for extremely low prices. If an operator does not agree, their contracts can be broken and the cruise line then finds another operator that will accept their terms. Cruise lines are therefore sometimes choosing tour operators (that they label as "highest standard" in the literature they send to you) based solely on price, not quality. By securing such contracts that pay local operators the bare minimum for their services, the cruise lines then increase the prices they charge you, in order to increase their profit margins. It's a bad deal for the passengers: Lower quality at higher prices. See the reports: "What You Need to Know about Shore Excursions" & the "Do-It-Yourself Guide" for more details.

Now that I have provided a general outline of how the system works, I want to show you exactly how you can beat that system. Each report that follows will offer you direct methods for enhancing your cruise experience. Remember, my goal is to provide you with the necessary tools that allow you to make educated and informed decisions during your voyage. As an Intelligent Cruiser, you will be rewarded for changing the way you approach your cruise vacation.

Let's start off by taking a look at

EXPECTED EXPENSES

When you pay your cruise fare, it is common knowledge that not every expense you will face is actually included in that price. Among the parts of your cruise that are included in the final price, is your cabin, meals and entertainment.

When calculating how much you plan to spend on your cruise, it can be difficult to get a somewhat accurate estimate of what the total cost of your cruise vacation will actually be.

It certainly doesn't take very long for all of the added expenses to pile up and even passengers who plan ahead and follow a strict budget are often quite surprised by some of the 'extras' that they never thought of.

We have provided a list below of all the other expenses that you should take into consideration when planning a cruise. We also provide a general estimate of what each aspect tends to cost as well a quick hint as to how you can reduce each expense as much as possible.

1. Port Fees & Taxes:

- These can range from \$100 - \$250 or more depending on the length and itinerary.
- There is nothing you can do to reduce these as cruise lines pass on the charges they must pay to dock in each port directly to the passengers.

2. Gratuities for the Ship's Crew Members:

- \$8 - \$12 per person per day based on cruise line's automatic gratuity systems. This amount is added to your final bill automatically and covers the tips for all the staff you interact with.
- Even with automatic gratuity systems, you are able to have all gratuities removed from your final bill if you wish. All you have to do is ask the Reception Desk to have your automatic tips taken off. Then, you can go and directly tip the staff that you were most impressed by and who made your vacation as special as possible.

3. Alcohol & Soda charges:

- From \$3.50 - \$8.00 for an alcoholic drink & \$1.00 - \$3.00 per soda.
- Contact your cruise lines to see if they allow you to bring your own alcohol (some do these days). This will save you a lot of money. Also, if you drink soda often, consider buying a 'soda package' which usually costs around \$25 and allows you drink unlimited soft drinks throughout the voyage.

4. Shore Excursions & Activities in Port:

- \$30 - \$150 and more per person if booking a ship-organized tour.
- By avoiding ship organized tours, you can save an absolute fortune (see our "What You Need to Know about Shore Excursions" section for more details).

5. Spa & Salon Treatments:

- \$20 - \$150 per treatment.
- Don't waste money on services that you can easily get at home for much less money, such as manicures and a hair cut. Only use the spa for something special, such as an exotic massage or unique facial treatment.

6. Shopping:

- Depends on how much shopping you want to do, but don't forget to budget properly for it.
- As you will discover in our Truth Exposed! Section, shopping during a cruise does not exactly live up to its lofty expectations. Good deals can be found but generally, there is nothing in a port (in terms of jewelry, watches, etc.) that you can't find for cheaper on the internet.

7. Airfare:

- This of course varies depending on how far and where you have to fly but can obviously be a significant additional expense to your vacation.
- Avoid purchasing your airfare through the cruise lines as this will drastically increase the price you will pay to get to and from your embarkation port. Shop around online as you are bound to find much better deals that will save you hundreds of dollars.

8. Casino Gambling:

- Depends on whether or not you want to gamble, but remember that the chips can add up quite easily considering you can charge it directly to your on board account.
- The best advice is not to gamble! We will talk about this topic more in our bonus material where you will learn exactly what you are up against when you sit down at a cruise ship's casino table or slot machine.

9. Playing Bingo:

- \$10 per card, with deals of 3 cards for \$20.
- This game gives you a little bit chance of winning, but still, is it worth spending \$100 on bingo cards for the slim possibility of winning \$500? Maybe it is, but if it doesn't work out, you will have wished you had saved that \$100.

10. Alternate Dining Venues:

- \$5 - \$50 per person cover charge (not including drinks) depending on which ship you are sailing on and the type of menu offered.
- With plenty of excellent food being served in the regular dining rooms, there is little reason to pay expensive cover charges for a meal in one of the ship's alternate dining venues. While you may want to treat yourself to a unique dining experience once during your cruise, you will save a lot of money if you don't make it a habit.

11. Internet & Telephone:

- From \$.15 cents to \$1.00 per minute for internet and \$4.00 - \$15.00 per minute for using the satellite phone system from your cabin.
- Simple. Don't send emails or make phone calls from the ship. Every port in the world has cheap internet cafes very close to the pier where you can also make cheap phone calls to friends and family back home. It is also more economical to activate your cell phone for 'roaming' before you go so you can just make the phone calls directly but without relying on the ship's expensive satellite system.

12. Bottled Water:

- \$2.00 - \$6.00 per bottle on board.
- Either buy your own in port (where you will seldom pay more than \$1.00) or fill up water bottles with the perfectly healthy drinking water that comes out of the water fountains on board the ship.

13. Foreign Exchange:

- High exchange fees are always charged on board for any currency exchange transactions.
- If you are headed to a country that does not use or accept US dollars (or your home currency), exchange your money before getting on board the ship or use a non-ship ATM machine in port. This will get you much better exchange rates while paying far fewer fees.

14. Treats – Ice Cream, Cappuccinos, Pastries & Cakes:

- \$1.00 - \$10.00 (this only applies when purchasing them from the specialty cafes on board as desserts and coffees are included in the dining rooms during meal times).
- Enjoy all the desserts you want after lunch and dinner and you won't have the urge to spend \$10 on a piece of apple pie at 3pm in the afternoon.

15. Ship Activities:

- \$5 - \$10 per class or session (yoga, pilates, rock climbing, ice skating, etc.).
- Read your daily newsletter that you receive in your cabin carefully. Apart from classes that charge a fee, there are always plenty of classes that are free.

16. Photographs:

- \$10 - \$30 per 8x11 photograph.
- Take your own photographs! When it is formal night, ask someone to take your photograph standing in the elegant lobby or other picture-perfect location. If you keep posing for the ship's photographers, you will find yourself wanting to buy those photographs at quite outrageous prices.

17. Travel Insurance:

- Expect to pay 4% - 10% of your total cruise fare for complete travel insurance.
- You can start by asking your travel agent if they offer any travel insurance incentives as sometimes they will add travel insurance into your package at no charge. Otherwise, you should check out websites such as the Trip Insurance Store (www.TripInsuranceStore.com) or Insure My Trip (www.InsureMyTrip.com), both of which allow you to compare insurance plans while providing a wealth of information on every possible option.

18. Souvenirs:

- Again, this is up to you, but don't forget to take these costs into consideration.
- Steer clear of the massive souvenir shops recommended by the cruise lines and head for the smaller, more local stands and craft markets. Not only will the prices be lower, but the products will be far more unique and interesting. Some of the best finds can be had at such shops and it will hardly put a dent in your wallet!

19. Extra Tipping:

- \$10 per day on average for tour guides, porters, staff at restaurants in port.
- By not eating in restaurants while in port or using ship-organized shore excursions (where you'll end up tipping the guide, driver & any other helpers) you can save yourself a decent amount of money that you can use on other aspects of your cruise.

20. Transfers To/From Ship to the Airport or Hotel:

- \$10 - \$30 per person using the cruise ship's shuttle services.
- Compare prices before you purchase anything. If you are two people that need to get to the Miami Airport, it may be cheaper to take a taxi than to pay for two tickets on the ship's organized shuttle bus. However, if the distance to your destination is quite far, the organized shuttle bus may prove to be much more economical. Generally, a cruise line's Shore Excursion Office or Front Desk can provide you with information on expected taxi fares to airports and hotels in the port where you will disembark.

6 WAYS TO CRUISE FOR FREE

It is a fact that on every voyage that takes place, no matter what the cruise line or itinerary, there are certain people on board who are simply not paying for their cruise. Some ships might have a few, others may have dozens. The last ship that I worked on would typically have around 30 passengers per voyage who were enjoying a 'free cruise'. What a way to travel to the Caribbean, Alaska, Canada, Mediterranean, Norwegian Fjords and South America!

You are now about to discover that there are actually quite a few ways to become one of these people. It is important to first understand that cruise lines certainly do not hand out free cruises just for asking, but they just may offer you a free cruise if you have something to offer them in return.

It is also important to keep in mind that many people want to get a free cruise. As a result, while it certainly is possible, it can be competitive. You will have a much better chance if you are willing to cruise during off-peak seasons or on an itinerary that may not be the most popular. Of course, this is a small price to pay for a free cruise! You should be able to enjoy it no matter where it takes you. Let's take a look at the options for getting a free cruise...

Gentlemen Host:

Gentlemen hosts are single men who are given the responsibility of entertaining and, more importantly, dancing with the mature, single women on board the ship. Usually between the ages of 45-70, these men simply spend their nights (and often part of their days) chatting and dancing away. In exchange for keeping the single ladies happy during the voyage, gentlemen hosts are given free cruise passage by the cruise line. They literally cruise for free just for dancing and talking!

The main requirement is the ability to not only dance, but dance well. In order to become a gentleman host, you do need to show that you are skilled at ballroom dancing. You must also be single, polite, personable and well-mannered and be able to socialize every day.

Few people would consider this socializing to be actual 'work', which is why gentlemen hosts often consider themselves to be the luckiest people on board the ship! They are generally treated like passengers, but are usually under the minimal direction of the Cruise Director/Entertainment Department. As a result, they are monitored to a certain extent in order to ensure they are fulfilling their agreement and they are expected to be stand-out representatives of the cruise line. Their schedule requires them to attend every dance or dance-related activity that takes place as well as other social gatherings that occur each night. In between events, however, they are free to enjoy their cruise as they wish without the restrictions placed upon actual ship's crew members.

At the end of the day, gentlemen hosts are cruising for free in exchange for some socializing, something that every cruise passenger already does! In order to apply to be a gentleman host, contact a cruise line's Entertainment Department at their head office (there is a link to all cruise line contact details at the end of this report). In addition, you can also contact **The Working Vacation**, a company that screens and places gentlemen hosts on many different cruise lines. They can be emailed at info@theworkingvacation.com.

On Board Lecturer:

When you open your daily newsletter during any cruise, you will undoubtedly find that there are several lectures scheduled throughout the day. This has become a very common way for cruise lines to offer their passengers some interesting entertainment, especially during the days when the ship is at sea and not in port.

The people giving the lectures, usually known as Enrichment Lecturers, get a free cruise in exchange for sharing their area of expertise with the other passengers.

If you are capable of giving a comprehensive lecture on a particular topic, you just might be able to use your knowledge to enjoy a free cruise. Cruise lines are looking for a variety of subject matter, including history (especially ship or marine related!), politics, business expertise, art, science, motivational speakers and more. If your area of knowledge can be geared towards the actual destinations of a particular voyage, you will become a much more appealing candidate as well. For example, if you are an expert on the ancient Roman Empire, consider looking for a cruise that travels to Italy. If you can speak about glaciers or polar ice caps, aim to become a lecturer on an Alaskan voyage.

Destination lecturers are also quite common and are people who speak about the history, culture, politics and sights of the specific places that a ship will be visiting. These lecturers provide two or three lectures per voyage, giving passengers all of the information they need to learn about and enjoy their visits to each port of call.

Enrichment lecturers must prove that they are qualified to speak on the topics they wish to present and usually the cruise line, or a hiring agency, will want to meet you in person before signing any contract. In addition, you must display a clear passion for your area of expertise and a dynamic personality that a cruise line believes will be well-received by their passengers.

Before you apply, you should put together an attractive proposal, complete with video and presentation materials, so that the cruise lines can gain an immediate understanding of your abilities.

Consider putting together a proposal for a series of 45-minute lectures as well (maybe 2-4 depending on the length of a cruise), as cruise lines love to fill several time slots with a topic that they feel will be of interest to their passengers.

**There are three main ways to get into the
Enrichment Lecturer circuit...**

1. Contact the cruise lines directly, either through email or by telephone, and ask to be put in touch with their Enrichment Program department. They will usually send you a list of the requirements they would need in order to consider your proposal or they will direct you to the appropriate agency if they do not hire lecturers directly.

Visit this website for the contact details of every major cruise line: www.cruising.org.

2. Contact specific agencies who supply enrichment lecturers to the cruise lines. Such agencies will take your proposal directly to the cruise lines that they know might be interested, thus cutting out a lot of the time and effort you might otherwise have to spend. However, these agencies do charge a fee for their services of course!

The three main enrichment lecturer hiring agencies:

To Sea With Z – Aventura, Florida – www.toseawithz.com

Sixth Star Entertainment – Ft. Lauderdale, Florida – www.sixthstar.com

Compass Speakers – Ft. Lauderdale, Florida – www.compassspeakers.com

3. If you know someone who has lectured on board a cruise ship, they may hold the key to getting you into the lecture circuit as well. They will already know the people who choose the lecturers and a few good words from a respected lecturer could go a long way in getting you on board as well. Don't be afraid to get to know the lecturers on your cruise. Since they have already gone through the entire process, they are certainly the best people to speak with about entering the circuit yourself.

Apart from giving their scheduled lectures, enrichment lecturers generally do not have any other responsibilities during their cruise. As a result, they enjoy a completely free and relaxing cruise in exchange for an hour or two of speaking about something that interests them. In addition, instead of receiving one free cruise, enrichment lecturers are usually given a free cabin, meaning that they can take a partner along as well for no added cost!

Instructors:

Throughout any voyage, there are always a number of classes that passengers can participate in. The subjects taught might include art, dance, cards, computers, even improvisational comedy and knitting. If you have a skill that others would be interested in learning, you might be able to earn your free cruise as an on board instructor.

Arts & Crafts classes are probably the most popular and take place on an almost daily basis on many voyages. Cruise lines need fresh topics for every class and will often hire several instructors for each cruise as a result. If you can teach watercolor painting, pencil sketching, creative ribbon making or even origami, you should apply to be an instructor. The list is endless! If you are able to teach something that is actually related to the destinations visited on a particular cruise, you are at an even bigger advantage. This would include folk art or the making of certain handicrafts from one of the countries on the itinerary.

Dance classes are also quite common and are often taught by individuals who are given a free cruise in exchange for their services. If you are a talented dancer who can demonstrate an ability to teach others, this is another great opportunity. By offering to teach a style of dance that is relevant to one of the destinations on a particular voyage, you will again have a much better chance. A cruise line certainly would love to have someone teach salsa on a voyage that visits Puerto Rico as opposed to line dancing!

If you are an avid bridge player, you can receive a free cruise in exchange for spending 1-3 hours per day playing bridge with other passengers. It really is that simple and there are bridge instructors on almost every voyage! As a bridge instructor, you will be required to assist any new players who want to learn and to also ensure that there is always an active session when scheduled. Apart from these enjoyable duties, you have no other responsibilities except to enjoy your cruise!

If you can demonstrate a high-level of computer knowledge and can teach computer classes on a variety of topics, you can try to land a free cruise as a computer instructor. Computer classes are often held several times a voyage and you must be able to offer unique lessons that appeal to a diverse crowd. Apart from offering clear instruction, you need to be able to answer questions and play the role of computer expert on board. In addition, it is also vital that you are able to remain very patient as participants will usually come from a variety of experience levels. However, for just an hour per day of your time, this is another path that leads to a free cruise.

Group Leaders:

This option does not involve an exchange of services or knowledge in order to receive a free cruise. Instead, becoming a group leader involves taking on the role of organizer, planner and liaison between the cruise line/travel agent and the members of your party.

When it comes to taking a cruise, the term 'group' refers to a collection of people sailing together. Depending on the cruise line, it takes anywhere from 8 to 12 cabins to be considered a group (the number is often less during off-peak times of the year). Whenever the magic number of bookings is reached, cruise lines offer a free berth to the person who is acting as the group leader (often referred to as the Tour Coordinator or Tour Conductor). As a result, not only can your family or friends easily become a 'group', but you can easily become a 'group leader'!

All you need to do is get the required number of people to join you on your cruise and label yourselves as a group. By reserving a group block of cabins (instead of just booking everyone individually), you will be entitled to discounted group rates as well as other perks and benefits cruise lines and travel agents usually provide such groups.

You can make group bookings either through a travel agency (who will often do most of the work for you!) or directly through the cruise line itself. Whichever way you choose, be sure to ask ahead of time how many bookings you need to not only be considered a group, but to receive the free 'group leader' berth.

As the group leader, you will be the sole liaison between your group and either the travel agent or the cruise line. This might not seem like much, however, you will be responsible for ensuring that every member of your group receives all of the necessary information and is fully up-to-date on all of the plans. Once you get on board the ship, the group leader is given a direct contact (usually the Group Services Coordinator) and will then be responsible for sorting out any issues that may arise.

Are friends and family actually considered a group? Get this: there are no rules as to who can make up a group, as long as the minimum number of people is reached. Groups can literally be based upon absolutely anything, from family reunions to hobbyists to fan clubs, birthdays, members of a church or even just a group of friends. Don't forget, any collection of people can be a group!

Keep in mind, however, that the group leader receives one free berth, not an entire cabin. If they don't want to share, they would need to recruit double the amount of people in order to receive an entire free cabin for themselves.

Finding out about group details for each specific cruise line is as easy as visiting a travel agent. They will be able to provide you with all of the requirements for each cruise line.

Contests:

Winning a free cruise through a contest is not necessarily as unrealistic as it may seem. However, it is important to be careful so that you avoid falling victim to some of the contest scams that pop up now and again.

It is highly recommended that you avoid any contest that requires you to provide extensive personal details, especially a credit card number. It may seem obvious, but plenty of people fall for these tricks and end up spending an absurd amount of money for the 'free cruise' that they apparently have won.

However, entering legitimate contests that offer a free cruise as its top prize is definitely recommended, as there are often far less people entering these contests than one might imagine. Many people do not think it is worth their time to complete the registration which in turn, gives those who do enter, a much better chance of winning.

Often, the best resources for winning a free cruise are the contests that are held by the cruise lines themselves. Check out each cruise line's website every couple of weeks in order to see if they are currently offering any 'free cruise' contests. Another good source can be some of the major cruise booking sites such as www.CruiseDirect.com and the cruise sections under the major travel booking sites such as www.Expedia.com.

Basically, if the contest seems suspicious or is not from a source you trust, it is best to avoid it completely. Any contest from a reputable website will not only be legitimate, but well worth entering! You just may find yourself winning a free cruise and without having to offer any of your services to the cruise line. It is without a doubt the best free cruise you could possibly have.

Religious Leaders:

This last method of getting a free cruise is for religious leaders who are willing and able to lead religious services on board a cruise ship. Pastors, preachers, rabbis, etc. are often invited on board ships to conduct services, especially during the major, and even minor, holiday seasons. If you are in this category of people, you should definitely contact the cruise lines in order to inquire about available opportunities. Often, they will add you to their list of people suitable to lead services. Whenever they have a need for your services, they will contact you to see if you are available. For a small time commitment, you can enjoy a completely free cruise to amazing destinations around the world!

As you have now discovered, getting a free cruise can be as easy as offering some of your talents and knowledge for a few hours each voyage. While the sections above covered the most common methods of getting a free cruise, the list certainly is not exhaustive. Most cruise lines will consider offering almost any activity that you may be able to conduct during a voyage, as long as it is interesting and suitable for their passenger demographics.

In addition, becoming a group leader or even winning a contest is not as far-fetched as you might have thought before. If it all sounds too good to be true, remember that thousands of people are taking advantage of these methods every year.

When you take your next cruise, you will now notice all of the people who are not paying anything to be on board. With a little persistence, it will soon be you who is enjoying the free cruise! Why should you miss out?

*In order to inquire about most of the above opportunities, you will need to contact the cruise lines directly. You can find all of the contact details for every department of every cruise line at the official site of the Cruise Lines International Association: www.cruising.org.

HINT #1:

If you do get a free cruise via one of the above methods, I strongly recommend introducing yourself to as many crew members as possible. It even helps to offer certain departments your assistance if needed. I have seen Enrichment Lecturers, Bridge Instructors and Group Leaders help the Tour Office during their busy, and often hectic, tour dispatch each morning in return for free shore excursions in every port!

HINT #2:

Airline frequent flyer points can often be exchanged for a cruise, as can points earned through the use of certain credit cards. Just keep your eyes open and you will suddenly find that there are far more ways to get a free cruise than you thought possible.

EXTRA CRUISE FARE DISCOUNTS

As you search for the best cruise fare possible, you are certain to come across many different discounts and 'specials' being offered by cruise lines, travel agents and travel websites. Eventually, after enough research, you will find the best deal for the ship, itinerary and class of cabin that you want.

At this point, you are ready to hand over your credit card and lock in that price. Before you actually take this step, you should make sure that you are not missing out on any additional discounts. There are little known discounts that can be combined with other offers and there are heavy discounts that are simply very difficult to find.

Here are some that few people bother to ask about but which can save you an extra 5%-10% on your total cruise fare:

1. Senior Discounts

The rules vary between each cruise line, but Carnival, Royal Caribbean, Costa, Norwegian Cruise Lines (NCL) and Celebrity all offer senior cruise fares. Often, only one person in the group has to be eligible in order for everyone in a cabin to receive the discount. The qualifying age is usually 55 or 60. Simply ask your travel agent if this discount can be applied to your cruise fare and you might save yourself an extra \$100 or more.

2. Regional Cruise Fares

Cruise lines have begun offering Regional Promotions in order to sell the last remaining cabins on their ships. This involves offering a discounted rate to potential customers living in a particular geographical area. Cruise lines often run several of these specials at all times, but these discounted fares are not advertised to the general public and are very difficult to find on the internet. The best method of learning about these fares is through a reliable and knowledgeable travel agent who specializes in cruise vacations. If you happen to find a regional deal that you qualify for, it just may turn out to be the lowest fare you have seen.

3. Military Discounts

Active members of the 5 branches of the U.S. military (and sometimes Canadian armed forces as well) are offered discounts on their cruise fare by several cruise lines. Again, the rules differ between each cruise line but some also extend the discount to veterans and military personnel who have been honorably discharged or disabled. Some cruise lines will allow this discount to be applied to everyone in the stateroom, even if only one person is eligible.

4. Public Safety Rates

Similarly, people who work in public safety positions can also receive discounts on their cruise fare. Such professions include police, firefighters and emergency medical technicians but can extend to many other similar occupations as well. If your job involves public safety duties, you should definitely ask whether or not you are eligible for an extra discount. Although this information is subject to change, Carnival, Royal Caribbean and Princess currently offer public safety cruise fare discounts.

5. Children Cruise for Free

If you are taking any young children with you on your cruise vacation, you might want to find a cruise line that is offering a 'children cruise free' deal. Periodically, cruise lines will allow children to cruise for free as long as they stay in the same cabin as the adults. On cruise lines that don't offer this discount, you will end up paying a reduced rate for the 3rd and 4th occupants (your children) of your cabin. There's quite a bit of money to be saved if you find a ship that does not charge anything for the young ones.

6. Shareholder Bonus

This is not technically a discount, but it is a way to get some free on board credit to spend as you wish during your cruise. If you own at least 100 shares of stock in Carnival Corporation, you are entitled to the following free on board credit when you sail on any of the cruise lines under their umbrella:

- When sailing with Carnival, Princess, Holland America or Seabourn: \$50 (6 day voyage or less), \$100 (7-13 days), \$250 (14 or more days) per stateroom
- When sailing with P&O, Ocean Village or Cunard: £25, £50, £125 per stateroom
- When sailing with Costa, AIDA or Ibero Cruises: €50, €100, €250 per stateroom
- When sailing with P&O Australia: \$50, \$100, \$250 AUD per stateroom

All you need to do is contact the cruise line or your travel agent and be prepared to provide proof of stock ownership in order to have the on board credit applied.

In addition, if you purchase 100 shares of Royal Caribbean stock you'll receive a \$250, \$150 or \$100 worth of on board credit per stateroom depending on the length of your voyage.

7. Credit Card Discounts

Before booking anything, you should always contact your credit card company(s) as often times they will offer discounts on your cruise fare, shipboard credits or at least frequent flyer/rewards miles if you pay for your entire cruise package with the credit card.

They may offer additional savings, shipboard credits or frequent flyer miles when you pay for your cruise in full with that credit card.

8. Other Discounts to Ask About

As cruise lines try to entice different groups of people to cruise with them, discounts are constantly changing and new ones are added all the time. Therefore, it is always important to ask your travel agent about the current list of discounts available. Other classifications of people that can often receive additional discounts include: airline crew, hospitality industry employees and union members.

And...

Don't Forget To Consider

1. Take a Transatlantic or Repositioning Cruise

Major savings can be had when cruise lines need to move their ships from one region of the world to another. Choose a one-way voyage from Miami to Alaska or from the Caribbean to Europe and you can save 50% the cost of a regular voyage of similar length. (Suites are often sold at bargain prices on such voyages as well!)

2. Book Your Cruise Without Booking A Specific Stateroom

Cruise lines allow passengers to make a booking for a particular voyage without actually confirming a specific stateroom. How it works is that you make your reservation for a specific category of stateroom only and the cruise line then guarantees to put you in a stateroom in this category or of a higher category if one is available. The downside is that you can't choose the exact location of your stateroom but the benefit is that you save money and just might end up with a free upgrade.

3. Back to Back Voyages

Many passengers book two consecutive voyages in a row, or back to back, and when they do, the cruise lines offer a heavily discounted rate for that second voyage. So if you're looking for an extended vacation and have a couple of weeks to spare, this is one way to enjoy a long cruise experience at a bargain price.

BOOKING A CRUISE WHILE ON A CRUISE

Many people do not want to book a cruise from anyone other than their trusted and favorite travel agent. If you do have a travel agent that works hard to make sure you have the smoothest vacation possible, then this makes perfect sense.

However, there is also another option for booking a cruise that will usually provide you with more benefits and freebies than booking anywhere else.

Some people are hesitant to use this option as they think it is simply too good to be true and therefore must have some 'catch' or they don't want to take business away from their travel agent.

Here's the best part: you can take advantage of this money-saving option AND still ensure that your booking is made through your travel agent.

This is what "On Board Cruise Booking" is all about.

Booking another cruise while you are actually on board a ship is the best way to take advantage of extra (and often quite attractive) perks that the cruise lines are not offering anywhere else. For example, in order to keep you as a loyal customer, cruise lines will often offer the following, just for booking your next cruise while on board:

- **Discounted cruise fares**
- **Reduced deposit amount**
- **Free cabin upgrades**
- **On board credit on your future cruise (as much as \$200 per person)**
- **Fare discounts that can be combined with other promotions**

Almost every ship has a "Cruise Sales Consultant" or similarly named position, where one or two people will sit down with you and go over every possible option you have for booking another cruise. They will have all of the latest itineraries and sailing dates (sometimes before they are even released to travel agents) and plenty of material for you to read before making a decision.

But the best part about all this is the FLEXIBILITY. You do not even have to know exactly when and where you want to go for your next cruise. If you make a booking on board, you can always contact your travel agent once you get home if you change your mind and want to switch to another ship or itinerary. Even if you change the booking, you will still keep all of the benefits!

Also, if you decide not to take that next cruise, the deposit that you had to give on board is fully refundable up to a certain period of time (please check each cruise line as these rules can change), so again, you lose nothing.

Finally, if you used a travel agent to book your initial cruise, your new ‘on board reservation’ will automatically be transferred and credited to that travel agent. Most cruise lines will also allow you to transfer the booking to any travel agent of your choice if you want to use someone different or to no travel agent at all if you prefer. This is a great benefit that cruise lines have added in order to ensure that travel agents do not lose any business as a result of these deals. After all, travel agents are the lifeline of the cruise industry.

In the end, booking your next cruise while you are on board a ship offers you perks and benefits that can not be found through any other method of booking. With a fully refundable deposit and the ability to change any part of your reservation without losing anything, there is no reason not to take advantage of this great booking system.

Here are a few extra tips about booking a cruise on board:

1. Visit the “Cruise Sales Consultant” early in the cruise when they are not so busy. You will then have their undivided attention and they will be more inclined to go over every option you have. As a result, they might uncover additional savings and benefits on certain voyages that they otherwise would not have had the time to find. When there are long lines outside their door at the end of the voyage, they simply do not have the time to provide such thorough service to everyone.
2. Always ask about the prices of cabins in the most expensive categories, even if all you want is an inside cabin! Cruise Sales Consultants receive commissions for the bookings they make. If they think you are about to spend a very large amount of money on a future cruise, they will pull out as many enticing bonuses as they possibly can in order to get your booking. Even if you end up booking the inside cabin, you just might have picked up a few extra bonuses that they can not take back once offered.
3. Make two or three future cruise bookings. Again, this added business (and extra commission for the Cruise Sales Consultant) will motivate them to offer as many ‘extras’ that they have the authority to attach to each of your bookings. When you get home, you can cancel some of the bookings and receive a 100% refund on the minimal deposit you made on board. But you can’t lose the extra benefits for that one booking that you keep!

Spoil Yourself With VIP Treatment



FORGET ABOUT COSTS - YOU WANT VALUE!

Take a few minutes and try to stop yourself from thinking about discounts and bargains and lower cruise fares. Stop thinking about how much your cruise is going to cost you or where you can find the best deal. Too much time is spent wondering whether or not your desired cabin can be had for a cheaper price or worrying that you might be paying more than those around you. I am certain that, in preparation for your cruise, you have been wondering these very things.

Discounts and bargains are certainly great, but I firmly believe that they should not be the only focus when it comes to the cost of your cruise vacation. What should be the focus? VALUE! Getting the most out of every single dollar you spend during your cruise is far more rewarding than spending hours on the internet trying to save an extra \$50 on your cruise fare. Others might brag about the bargain basement price they paid for their cruise, but after reading this material, you will simply smile and nod to these misled people, fully confident that you are receiving the better deal. You are about to master the art of getting the most bang for your buck on a cruise vacation.

Without taking more time to explain why you should focus on value over cost, let's get right to it and show you exactly how you can get the best value for your money with absolute minimal effort.

1. Anyone Can Become a VIP

At the start of every cruise, a list of VIPs sailing on board the ship is circulated to all of the department heads and senior officers. Upon receiving this list, there are precise guidelines that every department must follow as to how these "important" people are to be treated. The specifics vary among cruise lines, but such benefits as gifts, bottles of wine, spa treatments, preferred dining arrangements, complimentary cabin upgrades and priority embarkation and disembarkation are often part of the VIP treatment.

You are probably thinking, "Wait a minute, I am not a VIP." Well, I am here to tell you that you are! In fact, anyone can become a VIP when it comes to taking a cruise. The key to getting yourself on the VIP list is quite straightforward. Inform the cruise line that you are a VIP. If you book your cruise through a travel agent, have the agent tell the cruise line that you are a VIP. If you book your cruise independently, tell the cruise line yourself.

Use your occupation, interests and hobbies to your advantage, and describe yourself (or have your travel agent describe you) in the most advantageous way.

On the following page are some examples that have been used successfully:

Example #1

"I am a writer that submits travel reviews online." If you are familiar with the internet, you will know that, these days, anyone can write a quick and simple travel review that can potentially reach thousands of people. Tell the cruise line that you plan to write an article/review about a specific aspect of your cruise experience (i.e. dining, entertainment, cabin comfort, etc.) and that your work will be put onto an independent review website such as TripAdvisor.com. Although this does not qualify you as an actual journalist, you may be able to entice the cruise line to provide you with some extra benefits that will ensure you are more than satisfied with your cruise.

Example #2

"I am the owner of a business and am considering taking my entire company on a cruise next year with your cruise line." Even if your company consists of only you and your wife, this isn't a lie! Cruise lines love the idea of large group bookings and will usually try their best to impress the person who is considering making the reservation.

If you book through a travel agent, have them inform the cruise line that you are one of their most valued customers. This is a great way to receive some additional perks and upgrades that otherwise can be difficult to obtain. Cruise lines want to keep their affiliated travel agents happy, so that they will continue booking customers on their particular ships. As a result, they often treat a travel agent's VIPs as their own VIPs.

Have you already booked your cruise? Don't worry, there's still plenty of time to get your name on that exclusive list. During your voyage, if anything goes wrong at all – given the wrong cabin, bad plumbing, loud noises keeping you awake, incorrect dining arrangements, etc. – you can suggest to the appropriate manager that you be put on the VIP list as a quick and easy solution. I had dozens of passengers make this suggestion during my career, and I never denied the request (as long as it was asked for in a calm and pleasant manner). It is the simplest, easiest to implement and least expensive method for a cruise line to solve an issue. And you get to have a list of benefits that would have cost you hundreds of dollars!

During my years working on board cruise ships, I have seen actual VIP lists come into my email inbox that have included: dog walkers, marine historians, cousins of a friend of a cruise line employee, a plumber who used to be in the Navy, an elementary school teacher who taught a lesson about cruise ships, friends of a talk radio host in Idaho, a 'local marine artist' (he turned out to be a salesman who painted watercolors of sailboats as a hobby) & even a 14 year old boy who once built a model cruise ship. Anyone can end up on this list by employing some simple creativity.

Cruise lines are not going to offer free handouts, however, the good thing for you is that a lot of the time, all you need to do is ask.

2. The \$30 Motivator

At the end of your cruise, you will evaluate the service you received from the crew members and give out gratuities as you see fit. Unfortunately, since this process does take place at the end, money actually has little to do with how you are treated during your voyage. Crew members know that you are going to open your wallet and tip them (especially since many cruise lines automatically add a daily gratuity to your final bill), so there is little incentive for them to offer service that is above and beyond their standard.

This is where a mere \$30 dollars can change all of that in an absolute instant.

On the day that you board your cruise ship, it is vital that you interact with your cabin steward or stewardess. Meet him/her, introduce yourself, ask them where they are from and learn their name. This action alone will immediately put you in the top percentage of favored guests.

If you go ahead and take it one small step further, you will open up a door that can lead to unlimited benefits. Hand your cabin steward or stewardess \$30 dollars, telling them that you "just wanted to thank them for all of their hard work on embarkation day and that you really appreciate receiving your luggage on time." In addition, throw in a little line such as, "I am sure that we will be very pleased with your service, and trust me, I will continue to take care of you this week if we are." Shake their hand and enjoy your cruise!

It is also a good idea to 'pre-tip' your dining room waiter/waitress and maitre'd. If you hand them each \$10 - \$20 after dinner on the second night (not the first night as it is quite hectic and you want to make sure they remember you), any future requests should be accommodated without hesitation.

These simple gesture will motivate any crew member to work as hard as possible to ensure that you are well taken care of during your stay. If you require any special favors, have any difficult requests or just want to enjoy the absolute best service possible, that 'pre-tip' almost guarantees instant fulfillment of your needs. It will be like having a private butler without paying thousands of extra dollars for a penthouse suite.

Another great idea is to prepare 'gift packages' to give to your cabin steward/ess. These can be small bags containing a few special items from your hometown. Crew members would be very happy to receive such a gift and again, such a gesture would only lead to more benefits for you.

3. Become a Repeat Cruiser (even if you have never taken a cruise before!)

Most of the major cruise lines have been in operation for decades. More importantly, almost all of them have been around since well before the time when businesses began using computers. Some of the cruise lines we are talking about include Cunard (1844), P&O (1844), Holland America (1873), Princess Cruises (1966), NCL (1966), Royal Caribbean (1968) and Carnival (1972).

Before you book a vacation with a particular cruise line, do some quick research and find a ship that was in operation before 1980 under that same company.

After you find a suitable ship, continue your research and find the dates and ports of a particular voyage of that ship. The idea is to find a voyage that you potentially could have taken when you were younger.

Remember to carefully consider your age when doing this. If you are 50 years old now, don't choose a voyage from 1960, when you would have only been 2 years old! Choose a voyage from the late 1970s (a more reasonable age for you to have taken a cruise) and you will have a better chance at success.

Call the cruise line and explain that you want to book a cruise. Tell them that you had actually sailed on so-and-so ship in so-and-so year (make sure you have all of the correct information and tell them that you just found the details in an old journal) and were wondering if that qualifies you to become a member of their loyalty program. If at first they say no, be persistent. In the end, without computer records, there is no way for them to verify this information. Nine times out of ten, the booking agent will take the easiest option and just add you to the program. You will now be entitled to receive the perks of a veteran cruiser.

I have seen this method used over and over again to an incredible degree of success. The resulting benefits have included discounts on cruise fares, private cocktail receptions & bottles of wine, free internet usage and laundry services, priority dining options and more.

If you are unable to obtain 'repeat cruiser' status before you start your vacation, you may also want to visit the loyalty program office on board the ship. It is in their interest to make sure that your cruise is as smooth as possible (since you are already on board) and they often have even more flexibility than the cruise line's head office to make such decisions. The last thing a cruise ship wants is a negative comment card; as a result, the ship's staff is often given free rein to do whatever they feel necessary to keep their passengers happy.

***If you are successful in joining the loyalty program, obtain a list of everything you are entitled to once you get on board and be sure to take advantage of it all!**

HELPFUL HINT: Don't be afraid to simply ask the cruise line what they can do to enhance your vacation. As with most industries, there are dozens of discounts and special extras that are available but that few people actually know about. The only way to find out is to ask.

4. Don't Forget About the Freebies

Let me now focus on the aspects of a cruise that do not cost any extra money and which any value-seeking passenger would be foolish not to utilize. This section may seem quite obvious, but the truth is that a majority of passengers either do not know about or do not take advantage of all that is available.

Here is a list of the activities that you should really keep an eye out for: Dance and variety shows, comedians, musicians, guest lecturers and even celebrity appearances. In addition, a quick browse through the ship's daily newsletter will reveal dance classes, arts & crafts sessions, jazz performances, yoga instruction, computer learning, movie schedules, open-air deck parties and BBQs, passenger competitions ranging from golf putting to ping-pong and event guest talent shows. Other offerings that you absolutely do not want to miss include: galley tours, full ship tours, lectures by the navigational and chief officers and even sample spa treatments. These activities are almost always free!

You could fill every single day and night with activities that do not cost you a penny and your vacation would be no less rewarding than had you spent hundreds of extra dollars on wine tastings, casino gambling, specialty restaurants and art auctions.

5. Off-Peak = Better Value

Despite the above information, I know that you are eager to try many of the other services that your cruise ship will have to offer. Exotic massages, specialty dining venues, professional salon services, duty-free shopping, visits to the saunas and steam rooms, gambling – they are all very tempting! They are also all quite expensive. However, there are actually ways that you can enjoy all of these luxuries at a fraction of their normal cost. This is where “off-peak hours” enters the game.

Heavy discounts are offered during off-peak hours for almost all of the services that cost money. For example, on a day when your ship is in port, the beauty salon and on board spa will generally be empty. As a result, massages, chiropractor sessions, nail treatments, facials and more, will be advertised for up to 50% off the normal price. You can still go out and enjoy your days in port, but by returning to the ship an hour or two earlier than normal, you can still take advantage of these great “off-peak” deals.

Off-peak discounts are also available at the specialty restaurants that usually involve a dining surcharge of anywhere from \$10 - \$30 per person. Again, during port days and sometimes even on the first day of a cruise (when most guests want to get comfortable in the main dining room), ships promote such deals as 2 for 1, free appetizers or dessert, ½ price drinks and other specials that should not be missed. These provide the perfect opportunity to eat at the sushi bar, steak house, Mediterranean bistro or other unique restaurant, at a fraction of the normal cost.

The on board shops will also offer ‘sales’ at certain times during the voyage, and almost always on the final day of the cruise. Before you make any purchases on board the ship, check your daily newsletter for the next scheduled sale. Waiting one or two days to buy that item, might save you up to 50% of the cost. If the item you want is not at risk of selling out (i.e. t-shirts, souvenirs, basic jewelry), waiting until the final sale will guarantee the lowest prices possible.

6. Celebrate!

There are many reasons in life to celebrate, but there are even more reasons to celebrate when you take a cruise. Birthdays, anniversaries, graduations are all events that you need to inform the cruise line about in order to ensure that your celebration is absolutely perfect. Again, don't be afraid to get creative!

If you have something to celebrate, cruise lines are prepared to assist. They can offer everything from gifts and party facilities to meetings with the Captain and special arrangements for your port visits. The Executive Housekeeper on board every ship receives a spreadsheet at the start of every cruise, detailing exactly which guests are celebrating a special occasion. Each specific occasion has a unique set of arrangements that will be put into place upon the guest's arrival.

Keep in mind that celebrations are not limited to birthdays, anniversaries or graduations. Religious celebrations, business milestones and any personal achievements are all perfectly valid reasons for you to notify the cruise line that you want to celebrate during your cruise. Your travel agent can inform the cruise line as well and the reservation agent will add your requests into their system.

In the end, helping you celebrate your special occasion allows cruise lines to provide you with an enhanced experience at very little cost to them. All you need to do is inform the cruise line and once again, you shall enjoy the benefits.

7. Meet the Officers

If you sit down at the bar and notice an officer or two nearby (noticeable by their white or dark blue uniforms and epaulettes on their shoulders or sleeves), I highly recommend introducing yourself and starting a conversation. Many of the senior officers are either required to or choose to socialize with the guests throughout the cruise. They may sit down for a drink at a bar, go to the saunas or perhaps visit the nightclub for some dancing. Wherever you happen to find them, they could be your ticket to an exclusive benefit that few passengers even know about.

On almost every ship, there is usually a small gathering that takes place once a voyage between certain high level officers and a select group of passengers. It is not listed in the daily newsletter and there is definitely no announcement made over the broadcast system. Instead, this exclusive party (which is often held in a crew area such as the Officer's Bar or even the Captain's apartment) is by invitation only. In order to be invited, an officer must send you an invitation.

Officers do not send invitations to everyone they meet, however, if you happen to strike up a good conversation and make a good connection, you just might find an invitation outside your door shortly thereafter. You will then have a chance to mix and mingle with the senior officers in a very relaxed and personal setting, enjoying a rare behind-the-scenes glimpse that few people experience. This small event is often the absolute highlight of a cruise if you manage to get invited.

Even if you don't get invited, speaking to the senior officers is often an incredibly interesting way to spend some time, as their lives at sea are full of tales that simply do not come close to resembling the lives of those who live on land.

8. If at First You Don't Succeed, Try, Try, Again

Everything that we have discussed, either in this report or any of the others, can be implemented in one of two ways. For many of the methods, you can contact the cruise lines or your travel agent before your cruise in order to obtain the desired results. However, if that doesn't work, keep in mind that there is always a second option.

Once your cruise begins, you will find a team of officers and crew on board the ship that have a responsibility that no reservations agent in the head office has ever been given. The people working on board the ship do not have to convince you to take a cruise; instead, they are the ones who must ensure that you receive the vacation that you paid for. They must represent the cruise line, meet you face to face, offer their attention and service and deliver on all of the promises that the cruise line used to attract you in the first place.

The pressure to meet and exceed your expectations is massive. As a result, those men and women working on board the ships must provide, and have the ability to provide, instant satisfaction to all of their passengers. They don't have time to 'get back to you' or spend days and weeks discussing your request with supervisors. As long as your request or inquiry is reasonable and presented in a positive way (see the report, "Royal Treatment" for further details), they have little reason to say 'no'. Your overall experience depends directly on them, and at the end of the day, their job and their livelihood is interconnected with your satisfaction (and how you fill out your end of voyage comment card!).

Not only do department heads on board a ship want you to be happy, but they need you to be happy. They are given the power from their superiors to do whatever it takes to keep you happy, and you can now use this to your advantage.

***One final note:** I am now going to ask you to make a promise.

Promise yourself that during your cruise, you will take full advantage of the wonders of being at sea. I am talking about watching the multicolored, surreal sunsets; catching a glimpse of whales, dolphins or even flying fish skimming across the beautiful waters; admiring the glorious view of a tropical island bathed in soft evening colors as your ship slowly sails away from its majestic shores. In the end, such moments of wonder are some of the most fulfilling and memorable of any cruise. These moments are not organized by any cruise line and do not cost anything extra, yet they undoubtedly make all of the money you spent on your vacation instantly worth every single penny.

Making friends with the Entertainment team is always a good idea as they have a specific budget that allows them to buy drinks for passengers. They can also obtain huge discounts at the shops and spas for passengers they like!

ROYAL TREATMENT: HOW TO RECEIVE IT FOR FREE

What do the ship's crew members think about the passengers? What do they say when they finish work and head into the crew areas to socialize with their colleagues, far away from all of the guests? Even more importantly, why is this even relevant to the enjoyment of your cruise?

Let's find out what crew members do think and exactly why you need to know this information.

Here's what happens. Crew members spend up to 14 or 15 hours a day working as hard as possible at whatever job they have been assigned to do. Most crew members do the same job every day, in the same area of the ship and with the same schedule as the day before. They come into contact with hundreds of passengers, repeat the words "good morning", "good afternoon" and "good evening" thousands of times each shift and try their best to keep every passenger happy. Before long, as one might expect, they find themselves in the midst of a predictable and repetitive cycle and routine. The work is the same, the pay is the same and the guests, even though their faces differ from cruise to cruise, become the same as well.

When a person is stuck in a 'groundhog day routine' (a term that crew members often use to refer to their life on board the ship), every minute of every day blends together. Whether you work in an office, factory, gas station, school or ship, once you are in a routine, the only moments that stand out are those when something happens that is drastically different from the norm.

When it comes to life on board a cruise ship, there are two types of passengers that really stick out in the mind of a crew member. Each of these categories affects the happiness of the crew member and consequently, how they treat the guests they come into contact with.

The first category involves passengers that are referred to as "problem guests". These are the people who seem to lack a certain amount of human decency when dealing with the crew on board. They may be rude, display constant anger, speak in a demeaning tone or just cause one problem after another. You do not want to be a part of this category. When crew members walk behind the "Crew Only" doors at the end of the day, they spend hours in the crew bars, crew dining areas and their cabins, complaining and gossiping about the worst passengers on board.

As a result, it doesn't take long for the entire company of crew members to know exactly which guests are causing trouble. As the word spreads throughout the crew areas, such a passenger is automatically added to each crew member's unofficial list of "problem guests".

Becoming a "problem guest" is relatively easy to do and quite often, it happens unintentionally. Admittedly, this results in many good, decent people being viewed negatively by the crew for an incident, comment or slip of the tongue that the passenger was not even aware they had made. However, regardless of how you end up in this category, simply being there has the potential to negatively affect your cruise. Few crew members are going to be motivated to provide their best attention and service to a "problem guest" that is causing trouble for their fellow colleagues.

Rule #1: Avoid this category!

No situation warrants a negative or rude attitude directed at the crew members. These individuals work extremely hard and simply follow the rules given to them by the cruise line. If you have a genuine problem with anything on board, don't take it out on your waiter, bartender or receptionist. Speak directly with a senior officer who has the ability to solve your problem.

You must now be asking, "How does knowing all of this actually help me?" Here's the answer. Being aware of how crew members react towards passengers provides the perfect opportunity for anyone with a little common sense to use this information in their favor.

Just as a "problem guest" makes an impression on crew members living in an environment of constant routine, so do the passengers that climb into the complete opposite, and much smaller, category. I am now referring to the "favorite guest".

Unfortunately these days, a simple smile and "thank you" does not get you into this exclusive and highly rewarding category. There are nice people all over the ship - normal, every day folks that are polite and kind, but who don't make any impression on the crew. Although it is quite easy for people to fall into the category of "problem guest", it is not so easy for people to move into the more positive category of "favorite guest".

The sad truth is that being nasty stands out. Being normally polite and decent does not. But here's your chance to change the pattern, because overly polite and friendly people do get noticed.

Crew members absolutely love passengers who treat them respectfully. By simply using terms such as "Thank you very much (insert name)" and asking questions about their home countries and families, you can find yourself being viewed in the most favorable light by crew members.

Throughout my years, I interacted with hundreds of thousands of passengers as a department head on board several major cruise ships. Although I certainly do remember the worst of the "problem guests" I encountered, I also remember the best of the "favorite guests", many of whom I am still in touch with today. I remember the passengers who took the time to ask me where I was from, who shook my hand, who inquired about my future plans or passed by my office every day to say hello. These guests made a powerful impression on me.

As a result of their actions, I chose to go out of my way to ensure that they enjoyed the best experience possible during their cruise. In plain language, I gave them special treatment. The list is long, but here are a few of the things I did for "favorite guests": free shore excursions, complimentary drinks and meals, tickets to sold out shows and performances, private tours of the bridge and a meeting with the Captain, free satellite phone calls, cabin upgrades, on board credit, sent flowers, chocolate covered strawberries and champagne to cabins...and on and on...

I did not do any of the above in order to resolve a guest issue or complaint. Those are all examples of me simply rewarding those guests that affected my life in a positive way. Differentiate yourself in a positive way from the other passengers and you shall be rewarded. Imagine the possibilities if you are able to make a positive impression on several crew members!

Rule #2: Stand out in a positive way!

Create friendships and bonds with crew members in all positions. Everyone, from the bar waitress to the cabin steward to the social staff, have ways of providing you with extra benefits. Of course, building relationships with crew and officers in senior positions can be even more advantageous. They have the ability to make bigger wishes come true!

In the very least, getting yourself into this highly respected category of “favorite guest” will motivate crew members to give you their absolute best service. Since gratuities are given at the end of the voyage, there is little that your money can do to help you receive better service from every crew member you encounter. Leave it to extra smiles and an overly positive attitude to do the trick instead. Make the crew members around you happy and they will return the favor by infinitely enhancing your cruise experience.



WHO YOU NEED TO KNOW

All too often, I have seen experienced cruise passengers, website moderators and other self-professed 'cruise experts', offer one piece of incredibly incorrect advice. Every time I see this suggestion, my belief that such sources cannot be trusted becomes fully re-confirmed.

Such experts state that there are certain people on board the ship that you must get to know well. I completely agree with this statement. However, they then continue by stating that there are only three people whom you must get to know. As one so-called expert explains, "...in order to enjoy the most rewarding cruise possible, it is vital that you become friends with the Captain, Cruise Director and Hotel Manager."

Of course, as the three major faces of a cruise ship, these highest-level officers certainly do hold a lot of power and influence. But do you think that they, the three busiest and most sought after individuals, are interested in personally 'befriending' every single passenger? I can honestly tell you that this is definitely not something you will find on their 'to-do' list. Even if they wanted to get to know as many passengers as possible, they simply don't have the time. They hold the overall responsibility for every aspect of the ship and as a result, rarely leave their offices (except for the Cruise Director who must be 'out and about' most of the day). In actuality, I know more Hotel Directors and Cruise Directors who prefer to 'hide' from passengers in order to avoid having to 'act' socially. With the pressure they face in having to ensure a perfect cruise operation, their lack of a desire to socialize with every passenger is certainly understandable.

However, all of this should not be looked upon as a negative.

Instead, you should focus on getting to know the regular staff and crew, those members of the ship's company who are social and who will not try to 'hide' from you. Such crew members include your cabin steward/ess, waiters, bus boys, bartenders, shop staff, even the deck guys cleaning the side of the ship. There are hundreds of such people and they can definitely offer far more valuable advice and recommendations than the three listed above. To be honest, the lower you go in terms of the ship's managerial hierarchy, the more down-to-earth and useful will be the interactions.

These regular crew members do not have the cruise line's revenues or profits as their main motivation for working or even speaking to passengers. Sure, they want to help the company be successful, but in the end, that doesn't dictate every single word that they speak.

Perhaps you want some recommendations for what to do in each port of call. Who would know the best places to visit or where to find the most pristine and secret beaches? What are the 'must-sees' and 'must-dos' for first time visitors or those who have been a dozen times? At first, you might think that the on board Tour Office is a good place to start, and they certainly will have a wealth of knowledge. However, keep in mind that any recommendations or suggestions they offer will be designed to make you book a tour with them. Therefore, you will not actually be receiving the most objective and honest advice.

Would you rely on the Captain, Cruise Director or Hotel Manager – the three busiest officers, none of whom even leave the ship on port days? That does not sound very reasonable. Again, why not rely on the hundreds of regular crew members who enjoy hours of free time in every port. In addition, many crew members have been working on the same itinerary for weeks, months or even years, becoming true experts about the places you will visit.

The staff who work in the on board shops and in the ship's casinos don't even work at all during port days due to laws that prevent those facilities from being open. As a result, they get to spend every single port day off the ship, exploring and discovering the best places to visit. Just ask one or two of them for some recommendations and they could provide you with a long list of places and activities based upon your interests.

Over the years, I have spoken to hundreds of guests who told me that they had a wonderful day in port because of a recommendation that a crew member gave. For many of the ship's crew, their job is a once in a lifetime opportunity for them to earn good money and travel the world. As a result, they take advantage of every minute of free time they have, wanting to make the most of their visits to such exotic and rewarding destinations. After all, they will most likely never visit these places again once their careers are over. Let their enthusiasm and experience become your guide. They have no reason to lead you astray, especially since you will be back on board later in the day and know exactly where to find them! The assistance you will receive from these crew members is the most genuine and reliable available.

This theory works for more than just finding out where to go in each port. Crew members can sometimes provide guests with crew internet and phone cards (allowing you to save up to 75% on the rates charged to passengers), special souvenirs (such as ship's items that only certain crew have access to and which are not sold in the shops) and a whole wealth of information on where to find the best of the best on board. Build some friendships with the regular crew members and you are bound to benefit.

In the end, while it might be an interesting topic of conversation to say that you met the Captain, he can do very little for you, except to pose for a nice photograph. Getting to know those crew members whose motivations are much more similar to your own will prove to automatically add infinite value to your cruise vacation.

Truth Exposed!



INSIDER SECRETS

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SHORE EXCURSIONS

TAKING A CRUISE

Let's begin...first, taking a vacation on a cruise ship is an amazing way to spend your holiday. You will be spoiled with all of the amenities of a floating mega-resort - restaurant options, night life, pools, gyms and spas, classes and lectures, theater productions, games and gambling, and attentive service. When it comes to the on board experience, cruise ships have been fine-tuning their offerings in order to satisfy the needs and wants of every passenger. As a result, the time you spend on board will undoubtedly be rewarding beyond imagination, especially if you follow the advice we offer in the other sections of this package.

Even better, and without any effort whatsoever on your part, your ship will transport you to one or more ports of call for you to explore and enjoy, making the benefits of taking a cruise vacation truly hard to beat!



BE AN INTELLIGENT CRUISER!

Before you make any decisions about how you plan to spend your time in each island and port, think about this - cruise lines do not actually operate their tours but contract them out to local agents and even taxi drivers. What if you could book directly with these local operators & save a lot of money in the process? Well, not only is this very easy to do, but it is guaranteed to work and you are now about to learn how.

The following is expert information intended to provide you with a clearer perspective about the most beneficial methods for spending your time in each port of call during your cruise. By reading the below, you will instantly become a more **intelligent cruiser!** The decisions you make during your cruise will be wiser and more fulfilling by saving you valuable time, hassle and most importantly, hard-earned money.

Remember, this report is not based on the mere opinion of other cruise ship passengers. Instead, it comes to you straight from the source.

We are a well-respected and experienced team of cruise ship officers who have spent years working on board cruise ships of various cruise lines. During our time on board ships, we learned exactly what is needed for passengers to enjoy the most memorable and worthwhile times ashore, whether it be in St. Thomas, Grand Cayman, Cozumel, St. Maarten, Barbados or any of the other Caribbean ports.

We now pass our knowledge on to you.

WHAT IS A SHORE EXCURSION?

In some form or another, every passenger will be interested in taking a shore excursion during their cruise. The term 'shore excursion' or 'tour' includes not only scenic panoramic tours, historical sightseeing, snorkel expeditions, horseback riding, etc. but simple transfers to the beach or even to a quaint village for some free time on your own. Anything that involves using a local taxi, tour operator and/or tour guide can be considered a shore excursion.

Every passenger will most likely utilize at least one of those services at some point during their cruise. Whether you are interested in an all-day tour of every major sight with a gourmet lunch included or just a simple taxi ride to the beach and back, the following information is an excellent tool that benefits every cruise ship passenger.

IMPORTANT TIP!

Always take with you in port the tour description brochure that your cruise line provides.

If you book a ship-organized tour, compare the description to what you actually received and make sure it is what you paid for.

If you choose to explore independently, take the brochure outside with you and show a local operator or taxi driver the tour description that interests you.

They will be sure to give you the exact same experience, except that you will avoid being part of a large group, you can dictate how much time you spend at each sight and ***you will save money*** that you can use to spend elsewhere.

Ship-organized excursions...

Every cruise line offers a variety of shore excursions which are listed in their tour booking form. Offerings usually fit into a very standard formula in which you will find general sightseeing, alternative sightseeing, beach excursions, adventure tours, boat trips and water activities available. The idea of having a tour office on board the ship is so that you can theoretically allow the cruise line to plan your day for you and ensure that you will be taken on a tour by a reputable local tour operator.

Of course, passengers must pay a premium price for these excursions and ship tours can be up to 3 times more expensive than if you chose to use an independent tour operator for the same activity. However, to many, ship-organized tours offer a way to do as little planning as possible by putting their port visits solely in the hands of the cruise line.

There are certainly other benefits to booking on board, especially if you are interested in a unique itinerary that is exclusive to the cruise ship or that cannot be booked independently. Some tour operators might require all bookings for their tours to be made on board due to their contractual obligations. But in the end, such instances are more the exception than the rule.

Our goal is to provide you with information on alternative options, which is information that you will not find in any cruise brochure. Cruise ship-arranged tours can be satisfying and well-organized but before you book anything, you should familiarize yourself with the alternatives and how these alternatives provide their own set of attractive benefits. When it comes to the majority of standard tours, booking with the cruise line just might not be your best option.

During these difficult economic times, booking shore excursions without having a complete understanding of the nature of the business is not recommended, especially when this knowledge can keep a lot of extra money in your wallet.

Independent excursions...

A rapidly growing trend among cruise ship passengers is that more and more people are choosing NOT to book their tours with the cruise ship. Such people are opting to use the independent alternatives available in each port. Cruise ship passengers are intelligent human beings and they are now realizing that booking independent tours and transportation is not as 'risky' as the cruise lines warn about. In fact, booking independent tours has not only proven to provide a wider range of possibilities, but is overwhelmingly rewarding and far cheaper than booking on board.

It is important to understand that a high percentage of tours offered by cruise ships in the Caribbean, South America, Pacific Islands, the Mediterranean, Middle East and Asia are actually operated by taxi drivers! As a result, there is absolutely nothing stopping you from getting these same tours for 50% of the price by simply going directly to the taxi drivers themselves. By using the taxis that are on the pier and who are officially licensed to work with tourists, you gain the freedom to leave when you want, customize your day and avoid the restrictions of a set itinerary... and save money!

It is not uncommon for a \$50 sightseeing tour offered on board to cost only \$25 per person on land. And again, it is the same taxi drivers whichever option you choose. The decision can therefore be quite simple.

Another portion of ship-organized tours are nothing more than a taxi ride added on to a particular activity. Such ship tours as dolphin swims, beach breaks and adventure activities often fall into this category, where the cost for the activity includes inflated taxi fares that the cruise line must pay as per their contracts.

Therefore, if you simply want to go to the beach, take a taxi. Beach tours offered on board cruise ships limit the amount of time you can spend at the beach and they ensure that you are herded around in a large group. Take a taxi on your own and you avoid such a situation. Your only cost is the taxi fare and you will be charged either the official government rate or a much lower 'local' rate for that ride. Likewise, if you want to do a dolphin swim, just ask a taxi driver to take you to the dolphin park and pay for the swim once you arrive. This cuts out any middlemen and a big chunk of the on board price along with it.

In the end, when it comes to your days in port, you want to spend time wisely, avoid hassle and save money whenever possible without sacrificing quality. Cruise lines attempt to sell you on the idea that these are benefits that they offer with their tour programs and at times, this can be true.

However, on the next page, let us now further examine the alternatives and exactly how much you can benefit from them...

SAVING TIME!

*COMMON CRUISE MYTH: ONLY SHIP-ORGANIZED TOURS
MAXIMIZE YOUR TIME IN PORT*



When a cruise line explains that booking their shore excursions will save you time, they are suggesting that they can remove much of the planning involved with spending your time ashore. By booking ahead of time and letting them take care of everything, they promise to deliver the tour tickets to your cabin, have organized tour departure meeting locations and well-planned excursion itineraries. They want you to feel that their tour program allows passengers to utilize their time in port to the maximum advantage.

IS THIS ACTUALLY TRUE?

It can be. But these days, ships range in size from 150 passengers to 4000 passengers and, due to the sheer number of people, it is becoming an increasing challenge for cruise lines to maintain a well-organized tour program. Consider the scope involved: they must cater to thousands of passengers, organize bookings, distribute tickets, schedule departure times and locations, plan logistics on the pier, etc. It is a massive undertaking and although many ships do perform well, certain issues are bound to arise. As the cruise line itself acts only as a middleman, they must coordinate with all of their local tour operators and agents in each port of call. With so many parties involved, the room for error increases and can manifest itself in the form of incorrect bookings, incorrect tour departure times, tour content discrepancies, over bookings and more. And having to correct such issues does not save you much time at all.

BUT I DON'T WANT TO MISS THE SHIP...

The cruise lines also stress the notion that by booking on board, you will be sure to return to the ship on time as their tour operators are aware of the time restrictions. However, don't be fooled. Every tour operator in every port is perfectly aware that cruise ship passengers have time restrictions. Chances are you are not the first cruise ship passenger a tour operator has ever taken on tour! Cruise ship tourism is a major source of income in many ports around the world. As a result, locals know very well that a cruise ship arrives at a certain time, departs at a certain time and that all passengers must be back on board at a certain time as well. You may need to tell your independent driver/guide when your 'all aboard' time is in order to plan accordingly, but it's certainly not in anyone's interest to make you miss the ship.

WHAT IF SOMETHING HAPPENS?

The best precaution you can take against anything, and this applies to whether or not you are on a ship-organized tour or going independently, is to carry the daily program that the ship provides for each port. This will have the contact details of the local port agent who is in constant communication with the ship while it is in port. If anything were to happen (i.e. unexpected delays) the port agent should be contacted immediately and they will pass along the necessary information to the ship. Again, this is the case with both ship-organized and independent tours.

WHAT IS THE BEST TIME OF DAY TO GO ON TOUR?

Cruise-organized shore excursions have specific departure times as indicated in the ship's tour booking form. What few people realize, however, is that these times are usually planned in order for the ship to maximize their bookings. Unfortunately, passenger convenience gets sacrificed in the process. This is the reason that many tours, despite being only a few hours in length, depart the ship as early as 7:30am even though you are in port until 5:00pm. By operating the tours at such early times, the tour operator can add an additional afternoon departure of the same tour or of a different tour that will utilize that same transportation. Of course there are some tours that are 'all-day tours' and these need to leave very early in the morning, but most tours are an average of only 3-4 hours in length.

Why rush? Why wake up so early? Is this really saving you time by increasing the need for a lengthy daytime nap after your tour? The best time to go on tour is exactly when YOU want to go on tour.

HOW DOES THAT WORK?

By going independently, you can sleep later, enjoy a relaxing breakfast and take a tour at a time that you prefer, not that the ship prefers. The independent taxis and tour operators are waiting either on or at the end of the pier to serve you, whenever you come off the ship. Almost never is there a situation where there are no more taxis or independent tour guides left on the pier to assist you, especially if you do not wait until the end of the day to leave the ship.

A 7:30am organized tour, after a night of enjoying the ship's entertainment and nightlife, is probably not very appealing and it will make most people very tired for the remainder of the day. So why not take it slow, receive sufficient rest, enjoy a wonderful day ashore at your own pace, and be full of energy when you return.

That is not only saving time, but adding value to every minute of your cruise vacation!

AVOIDING HASSLE!

*COMMON CRUISE MYTH: BOOKING ON BOARD
ELIMINATES ALL POTENTIAL HASSLE*



Booking your shore excursions with the cruise line can be hassle-free, which is exactly what is often promised to you in their literature. However, exploring the islands using independent shore excursions can also be hassle-free, so you should not believe that booking on board will actually save you any hassle. If you follow the simple steps outlined in our Do-It-Yourself Guide and on the final page of this section, you will be in an excellent position to eliminate any possibility of hassle whatsoever.

WHAT CAN POSSIBLY GO WRONG?

When passengers pre-book their tours with the cruise line, sometimes months in advance, there are many circumstances that can occur. It is not uncommon for people to discover once they arrive on board that their tour has been canceled, is no longer operating or that the tickets they received in their cabin are not for the tours they had booked. This results in having to spend valuable time during the first couple of days of your cruise planning your time in port all over again. By this time, many of the alternative tours will have been sold out and you just might be left quite frustrated and dissatisfied with the remaining options. There also can be very little that the on board Tour Staff can do to resolve your problem. That does not sound very hassle-free and it occurs more frequently than you might think.

But if you plan ahead and understand what to expect when arriving in port, you can enjoy a truly hassle-free experience by taking charge yourself. You can explore the ports with independent tour operators that are eagerly waiting just outside the ship for the opportunity to show you the highlights of their home country.

ARE SHIP-ORGANIZED TOURS GUARANTEED TO OPERATE?

Ship-booked tours always carry the possibility of being canceled a day or two before arrival in port. You will find this disclaimer in the small print where it will state that all tours require a minimum number of participants to operate. Each voyage, the Tour Office must cancel tours if they are unable to reach the minimum bookings (and in reality, make enough profit). You might wake up one morning ready to enjoy your tour in Jamaica but suddenly find a letter outside your cabin explaining that your tour has been canceled due to low participation. And of course it may already be too late to book another tour on board the ship.

Also, many operators that the cruise ships work with use the same vehicles multiple times a day for multiple tours. For example, a scenic tour that departs at 9am will use vehicles that are also scheduled for the 12pm departure of the same tour or even of a different tour. If there is any delay during the early departure, this will then delay the later one and you could be left standing in the heat on the pier waiting for your tour to begin.

HOW IS AN INDEPENDENT OPERATOR DIFFERENT?

An independent operator is not going to make you wait for anything – you agree to a time, whether you book ahead or directly on the pier, and the vehicle arrives and off you go – they are not booking back to back tours. These operators/taxi drivers are dedicated to receiving excellent feedback and they will usually do their best to earn it. The better feedback they receive, the more word-of-mouth recommendations and ultimately the more business they will enjoy. Some of the most interesting, colorful, informative and most-sought after independent drivers and guides actually avoid signing contracts with the cruise lines. They do not want their unique abilities and services to be affected by having to charge very low prices to the cruise line (so that the price can be sufficiently marked up). They simply want to provide the highest quality of hassle-free, rewarding services possible!

Also, they will not cancel your tour due to minimums. Whether you are part of a large group, a family of four, a couple or even traveling solo, an independent tour operator rarely has any reason to turn your business away. Therefore, at any given time, in any given port, these independent operators are there to actually ensure that your time spent visiting their country or island is as smooth as possible.

There can be nothing more hassle-free than having a dedicated local driver/guide as your grateful host!

SAVING MONEY!

COMMON CRUISE MYTH: SHIP-ORGANIZED TOURS ARE THE BEST VALUE FOR YOUR MONEY



It is a simple fact – the more components involved in a particular shore excursion, the higher the price that will be charged to you, the passenger. Therefore, if you know how to eliminate even just one of the unnecessary components, you are guaranteed to save money. As you are now learning, simply walking out onto the pier or contacting local operators directly automatically eliminates at least one or two factors and saves you a great deal of money.

WHY IS THE COST HIGHER ON BOARD?

When it comes to ship-organized tours, as we mentioned earlier, many of the local operators that cruise lines use, turn around and hire taxis to conduct the actual tours. All they do is order a suitable number of vehicles to accommodate the number of bookings made on board. So already, most ship-organized tours have three components – the ship, the 'tour operator' and the taxi company, and each of these components must get paid. This is clearly reflected in the price that you will be charged. And remember, many tours around the world (especially in the Caribbean, South America and South Pacific) are actually run by taxi drivers.

HOW DO I SAVE?

Why should you spend all this money to do something that you can do right on the pier – book a private taxi tour. Think of the money you will save as you will be paying the actual operator directly; not the cruise line, not any middlemen and not any booking agents. Licensed taxi companies are almost always waiting outside the ship when you arrive, ready to take independent guests on the exact same tours as the ship offers for usually half the price of what the ship charges. In the end, you can actually create a fully customized tour by speaking with the driver and fine-tuning a potential itinerary based upon your interests. Imagine that - a fully customized tour for half the price!

You are now going directly to the source and by avoiding some of the other components, you are going to pay the lowest price possible for the exact same services. We recommend contacting some of the independent operators listed in our Caribbean Savings section or those that you find on the internet if you are headed to a different part of the world. You can then compare exactly what they offer to the ship's prices. You have nothing to lose and will find some incredible deals!

HOW ABOUT MORE ACTIVE TOURS?

If you want a snorkeling tour, catamaran sail or other active excursion, you can book these independently as well. There are always independent operators offering such services and as you might now expect, they will do whatever it takes to provide you with an unforgettable experience. Booking such tours should be done prior to the start of your cruise. However, do not be turned off by this, as again, there is a lot of money to be saved. By directly contacting local tour operators who offer the activities you want, you can enjoy added benefits such as free transportation (eliminates the 'taxi fare' the cruise ship price includes), customized itineraries, better choice of tour times and of course, A BETTER PRICE!

HOW DO I ENSURE QUALITY?

Cruise ships are quick to point out that their tour program only uses select tour operators that provide a standard of excellence that is on par with the cruise line's own high standards. However, if you read further into the fine print, the cruise line will also explain that their tours are run by 'local operators' and that the cruise line is in no way liable for anything that occurs. They want to take your money but they do not want to be responsible.

The quality of a shore excursion clearly has nothing to do with whether or not you book it on board. As we have already discovered, tour drivers/guides are often from the same taxi company regardless of whether or not you book the tour with the ship or directly with the operator. However, you will often find that the independent drivers/guides on the pier are far more motivated and grateful to have your business. These locals are offering services in a very competitive industry and must therefore be able to provide the highest quality and most enjoyable experiences possible. They rely solely on their performance and resulting recommendations in order to gain more business. Passengers returning from independent tours are often more than delighted because they spent the day at their own pace, doing exactly what they wanted to with a guide who had only their best interests in mind. That is quality!

THE EASIEST SOLUTION

As an Intelligent Cruiser, you need to know that cruise lines want to pay the tour operators as little as possible and charge you, the passenger, as much as possible. As a result, they often contract with tour operators that offer them the lowest prices, not necessarily the highest quality. In the end, a cruise line will easily refund a few hundred dollars to guests unhappy with the quality of their ship-organized tour as this hardly creates a dent in their profits.

It is certainly much easier and worthwhile to walk out to the end of the pier, use an officially licensed taxi or tour operator, pay them directly and receive a quality experience for a bargain price!

10 STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL DAY ASHORE

- When you leave the ship, take the ship's port map & daily program (which has the local port agent's contact details) with you.
- Ask around on the pier/in the terminal building where you can find the independent tour operators, taxis and tourism offices.
- Tell the tourism staff, taxi drivers and guides what you wish to do and ask for recommendations based upon your interests. They know their home country better than anyone!
- Check the credentials of any driver/guide you speak with in order to ensure that they are properly licensed with the local government. Their credentials should be clearly displayed inside of their vehicle.
- Agree on a particular itinerary or destination be specific in regards to total duration, content, allotted time at each location, flexibility and exactly what is and what is not included.
- Negotiate and agree on a price. Don't be afraid to bargain!
- If you only require a round-trip transfer (to a beach, waterfall, village, etc.), pay half the price up front and the second half on the way back to the ship.
- At any stop where you plan to spend time on your own, agree with the driver on a specific meeting place & time to pick you up.
- Time permitting, and if you wish to do some shopping, ask your driver to end the tour in the center of town in order to avoid having to take a separate taxi or shuttle.
- Tip your driver according to the level of service you received & if you were happy with your day, be sure to ask for some business cards so that you can spread the word to other visitors!

TOP BEACHES

of the Caribbean...

ANGUILLA:	Shoal Bay
ANTIGUA:	Dickenson Bay
ARUBA:	Palm Beach
BAHAMAS:	Pink Sand Beach
BARBADOS:	Gold Coast
BONAIRE:	Pink Beach
COZUMEL:	Paradise Beach
CURACAO:	Seaquarium Beach
GRAND CAYMAN:	Seven Mile Beach
GRENADA:	Grand Anse Beach
JAMAICA:	Negril Beach
MARTINIQUE:	Diamond Beach
PUERTO RICO:	Luquillo Beach
ST. BARTS:	St. Jean Beach
ST. JOHN:	Trunk Bay
ST. KITTS:	South Friar's Beach
ST. LUCIA:	Reduit Beach
ST. MAARTEN:	Orient Beach
ST. THOMAS:	Magen's Bay
TORTOLA:	Cane Garden Bay
TRINIDAD:	Maracas Beach
TURKS & CAICOS:	Grace Bay Beach

*The above list consists of quality beaches that can be reached by taxi with relative ease from the cruise ship piers.

Below is an example of how an independent tour can be a win-win situation for everyone!

WHERE YOUR MONEY GOES

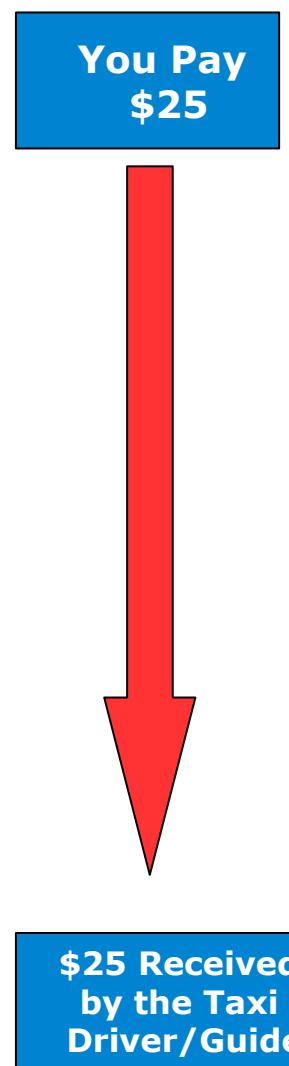
When Booking a Shore Excursion

4-Hour Sightseeing Tour

Ship-organized



Independent



TO SHOP OR NOT TO SHOP?

Almost everybody who takes a cruise these days will spend at least a few minutes in each port of call partaking in that grand activity known as shopping. In fact, many people will spend much more than a few minutes shopping as they search for incredible bargains on jewelry, electronics, alcohol, souvenirs and more.

In order to offer some assistance to their passengers, most cruise ships have a "Shopping Program" on board, led by a "Shopping Lecturer" or "Port & Shopping Consultant". The purpose of such a program, according to the cruise lines, is to provide passengers with all of the information they need to ensure they get the best prices and the best quality goods during their on shore shopping experiences.

Of course, as you might imagine, there is much more to these shopping programs than there may initially seem.

There are several companies in the USA that are actually behind the shopping programs implemented on the cruise ships. These companies are in no way a part of the cruise lines directly. Instead, they create the entire 'shopping program' and then operate it themselves on board the ship. In exchange for being allowed to implement their shopping program on board, these companies pay hefty fees to the cruise lines in order to secure the contracts.

Therefore, the Port & Shopping Consultant does not actually work for the cruise line either, as they are trained, employed and sent on to the cruise ships by these land-based companies.

Their job is to then earn money, not only for themselves, but for their company as well. So even though the cruise lines will claim that they provide their passengers with a helpful shopping program, they have already received their check and have little interest in whether or not you actually follow the advice of the Shopping Lecturer. (Actually, on many ships, there is a bit of a conflict as a persuasive shopping lecturer can actually convince passengers to go shopping instead of taking a shore excursion in port. This leads to more money for the shopping company but a loss for the cruise lines. The more skilled of the Shopping Lecturers will also push some of the ship's shore excursions during their talks, in order to keep everyone on board, including the ship's management, happy.)

At first, this may all sound great. Other people are doing all of the shopping research for you so that all you have to do is follow their recommendations and reap the benefits. That certainly would be great, but unfortunately, that is not exactly the situation.

Over the first few days of any voyage, the Port & Shopping Consultant will give one or two lectures in the main theater. They will often advertise these lectures as Port Lectures even though only about 5% of the time is spent on giving out useful port information while the other 95% is spent trying to convince passengers to shop ONLY at the recommended shops.

These Shopping Consultants have also gone through extensive training, in which they must master the arts of the subtle, and no-so-subtle, selling techniques. They are not exactly trying to sell you anything in particular, except for the idea that you should not shop anywhere else but at the 'approved' shops found in the Shopping Maps that they provide.

Let's take a quick look at how these shops actually end up on the "Recommended / Approved Shopping List":

In order for a shop to end up on the list of 'recommended shops', they must adhere to certain standards of service and quality. However, the most important thing they need is money. These shops actually pay to be advertised in the shopping maps. As a result, the shops that are being intensely pushed as the 'best of the best' are actually those that have shelled out big bucks to be on that list. It's quite a good investment. They are virtually guaranteed to have hundreds, if not thousands, of potential customers walk through their doors each day, just by being mentioned by the Shopping Lecturer. Not only does the Shopping Lecturer 'recommend' these shops, but they practically scare passengers into thinking that shopping at any shop not on the 'recommended' list, is a guaranteed recipe for being ripped-off and taken advantage of.

Fear is a powerful tool, and these shopping programs use this tactic very skillfully.

It is true that during the lectures at the start of the voyage, the Shopping Lecturer is going to describe a whole list of benefits that you will receive by shopping at the recommended shops. While the benefits can vary, they almost always include the following:

- **Guarantee:** You usually have 30-days to return a product you buy at a recommended shop.
- **High Standards:** Every shop listed has been fully checked to ensure they have met certain requirements of business standards.
- **Best Prices:** These shops can offer the best prices due to the high volume of customers they receive.
- **Professional Sales Staff:** The listed shops only employ the most professional and knowledgeable sales staff whose aim is to make your shopping experience as smooth and enjoyable as possible.

These are certainly some great benefits that most of us would want to have every time we go into a store anywhere in the world. But before you convince yourself that these shopping programs are the way to go...let's look at those benefits one more time:

- **Guarantee:** If you read the fine print on the shopping maps closely enough, you will find that if you are not happy with your purchase, you must contact a third-party agent in order to make a claim for a refund. The cruise line won't help you and neither will the Shopping Program company. Getting that refund for a defective product or an overestimated piece of jewelry is not exactly as easy as the Shopping Lecturer claims it to be.
- **High Standards:** Again, the shops listed in the shopping maps have PAID to be there, which in no way reflects the actual reputation of a particular shop. While they are checked for certain standards, in the end, it all comes down to money.

- **Best Prices:** Unfortunately, the opposite can also be true when it comes to these recommended shops. Once the Shopping Lecturer has successfully scared the passengers away from shopping at non-recommended shops, there is no way for the passengers to actually compare prices when shopping ashore. They are just taking the Shopping Lecturer's word that they will get the best prices at his/her recommended shops. As a result, these recommended shops can actually charge higher prices since their competition is virtually eliminated. In addition, with so many other familiar passengers around and signs everywhere stating "Recommended Shop", the shop owners know that you will willingly pay a premium for such security. Usually, the Shopping Lecturer spends each day in port running around from shop to shop, 'helping' people with their purchases. All they are really doing is looking around for passengers who are about to make a purchase. They then step in, 'inspect' the item (ring, watch, necklace, etc.) and confirm that you are getting an incredible deal. With the Shopping Lecturer's approval, passengers don't think twice about paying such high prices...and the Shopping Lecturer gets a hefty cut – more about that below!
- **Professional Staff:** Yes, the staff in the recommended shops is certainly highly trained. If you visit only the shops on the shopping map, you are basically putting yourself in front of the most highly trained salespeople in the world. They work long hours every single day at honing their ability to convince cruise ship passengers to part with large sums of money. Once the purchase is made, they have done their job. After all, you will soon be back on board your ship and not about to return any time soon.

So what does all of this mean?

If you head off into port for some shopping, the best thing that you can do is to shop around.

At the end of the day, just because certain shops are recommended by a Shopping Lecturer (who earns an incredible commission from these shops), does not mean that is the only place you should look. The non-recommended shops have great reason to offer you even better deals because they don't have the luxury of having so many people walking through their doors. They need to attract customers by word of mouth and the only way for that to happen is by offering better service and better prices than their competition. While this may not be true for every shop in every port, it doesn't take long to find the hidden gems.

A quick 5 minute search on the internet will easily reveal some of the best 'non-recommended' shops in any port of call. There are also thousands of shops out there that have chosen not to pay to be advertised in a ship's shopping program and rely strictly on positive word of mouth recommendations between passengers. These are the shops you want to look for.

As long as you are not 'scared' into thinking that you have no other options but the recommended shops, your shopping experience will be much more rewarding.

Here are some final pieces of advice when it comes to shopping during a cruise vacation.

1. If you find something that you absolutely love in any shop, recommended or not, and you are happy with the price, by all means, go for it!
2. If you are unsure of whether or not to buy something, we would recommend putting it down and walking away. The days of absolute duty-free bargains are over and usually you can find the exact same piece of jewelry or watch for even cheaper on the internet. So unless you really want it right then and there, put your wallet away and save that money.
3. Be aware that most people wanting to 'help' you with your shopping experience are probably trying to get a cut of whatever you spend. Whether it is the on board Shopping Consultant or the tourism official on the pier, recommending certain shops is an easy way to make some extra money. And if they are making money on your purchases, you can expect to pay much higher prices for anything you buy. The shop will basically add in the commissions they have to pay out so that they don't lose any money on the sale.
4. Don't worry too much. Although this topic may seem a bit deflating, we just want you to have as much information as possible. With this knowledge, you will be able to make better decisions when you are out shopping in port. As a result, the chances of you being taken advantage of will be greatly reduced and you can shop with more confidence by knowing exactly how the game is being played.

THE ART OF BARGAINING

For many cruise ship passengers, shopping while in port is an integral part of a cruise vacation. There are simply too many wonderful things to buy in too many wonderful places around the world! Even if you are not an avid shopper, it is still very hard to take a few steps in port without someone trying to entice you to spend your money at their shop. You are constantly running into massive craft markets, mega shopping complexes and even rows of vendors and shops right on the pier. It can often be quite overwhelming.

We have all heard the popular theory that when shopping in port during a cruise, you should always bargain. To be honest, this is completely solid advice. However, do most of us really know how to bargain properly in order to ensure you are paying the best price possible?

For many people, the idea of bargaining is a difficult concept and seems very awkward and uncomfortable. Very often, people end up spending much too much money when shopping during a cruise, simply because they don't want to reject a shop owner's initial offer. You might actually start to 'feel bad' about doing so and as a result, accept whatever highly-inflated price is given.

But bargaining is an important part of shopping, whether you are in the Caribbean, Mediterranean, South America, Asia or the Middle East. Every day, local shop owners in these parts of the world are honing their own bargaining skills as thousands of potential customers walk through their doors. They use persuasive gestures, skillful mind games and carefully worded lines to persuade you to take their offer.

Therefore, if you don't want to overpay for anything, you must know exactly how to play the game as well. You need to strengthen your own bargaining abilities before the shop owners pry as much of your money as possible straight out of your wallet!

Here are some valuable bargaining tips that are sure to help you walk away as the winner in any bargaining session you find yourself in:

- It is important to remember that the practice of bargaining is actually the accepted way of doing business in many cultures and countries. As a result, don't feel embarrassed or too shy; the shop owner is assuming that you will start to bargain.
- When you find an item that you are interested in buying, remember this one vital rule: Do not appear interested in buying it! Remain relaxed and as indifferent as possible and nonchalantly ask the shop owner how much the item costs.
- Let the game begin! Continue appearing disinterested by immediately putting the item back once you hear the price. If the shop owner detects your desire to own this item, you will fall directly into their trap. It also helps to display some shock at this initial price.
- Walk away. Even if you absolutely 'need' to have this item, simply walk away and head for the exit of the shop. If you reach the exit and make it outside, the shop owner knows you will be enticed by another shop and he will lose your business.

- Don't worry - you will never make it as far as the exit. The shop owner will undoubtedly do his best to keep you from leaving. He will shout out to you such lines as, "Give me a price" or "What do you want to pay?"
- Maintain your air of indifference and pretend that you are thinking hard about whether or not you really want this item and how much it is worth to you. Then make an offer of your own that is about 30% lower than what you really want to pay.
- Your offer will most likely be met by a slight chuckle and a comment such as, "Come on, I would make no money" or "Are you serious? You can't be serious." Stand firm and don't fall for these tricky attempts to get you to accept a higher price.
- What should you do? Walk away and head for the exit one more time. Sure enough, the shop owner will call you back again, making another offer that will sound much more reasonable than the first.
- Now you need to decide how much you really want to pay for the item. If you are happy with the latest offer, then simply close the deal. If you still think that the price is too high, make another counter-offer that is only slightly higher than your first offer.
- Generally, you can now exchange offers until you reach a price that you are willing to pay. Always examine the shop owner's counteroffers. If he is dropping the price by significant amounts each time, then you know that his initial offer was outrageously over-priced.
- At some point, the shop owner might refuse to come down any lower. You now know that you have reached the lowest price that he is willing to sell the item for. It is now up to you to either accept or decline this final offer.

Another important rule when it comes to whether or not you should buy a particular item while on vacation is this: If you really love something and you find the price to be what you consider reasonable, then you should go ahead and buy it. Also, if you make an offer that is accepted by the shop owner, it is also customary that you then make the purchase.

However, if you really don't want the item or you are not happy with the final offer, then don't purchase it. Even after a session of bargaining, it is perfectly acceptable to simply walk away and continue your search if you are not happy with the result. You might find the same item for a lower price somewhere else or you may find something different that attracts your attention even more.

With a little practice, bargaining will become very easy and natural. It really is an important part of the shopping experience during a cruise, especially for anyone wanting to save a lot of money and avoid being ripped off. Remember, in many cruise ship ports around the world, bargaining is not only accepted, but it is usually expected as well.

BEFORE YOU BID....THE TRUTH ABOUT ART AUCTIONS

Cruise ship art auctions can be a major highlight of taking a cruise for many people, especially those who believe that because a ship is at sea, art auctions provide the best way to pick up some original pieces of art at heavily discounted prices.

Unfortunately, being 'at sea' actually does not benefit the passenger at all, and in the end, it actually allows the auction houses to get people to pay much higher prices than they would on land for similar pieces.

So before you spend \$1000, \$5000 or even more on a 'piece of art' during your next cruise, make sure you understand exactly what you are getting into.

To begin with, art auctions at sea DO NOT operate under United States or any other country's laws about how auctions should be conducted. As a result, since the auctions take place in international waters, the auction houses basically create their own rules about how they will conduct their auctions. They simply do not have to follow any specified laws and therefore do not have to answer to any legal system on land.

This fact alone should cause anyone to think twice before attending an art auction during their cruise. If you do, just be aware that you might not be dealing with the most honest and ethical of businesses.

So how does it work?

Let the fun begin! Announcements will be made, invitations sent to your cabin. You will be eagerly invited, if not urged, by the ship's art auctioneer to attend one of the regularly scheduled auctions. You will be given free champagne upon arrival, as much as you want to drink. The art auctioneer and his/her assistants will chat you up, using several well-practiced tactics to get you excited about the upcoming auction. They want you to firmly believe that buying art is one of the best 'investments' that you could possibly make.

The auctioneer will speak to you about the value of artwork and how the pieces they are about to auction are bound to appreciate in value within a short period of time. They will have you believing that every single piece of art will be worth incredible amounts of money, money that you can use to invest in your future, or pass along to your family as part of their inheritance. You will hear that art collection is one of the most reliable and safest ways to protect your money.

Be careful! While some of what you hear may be true, you will soon find out why none of it actually applies to the pieces of art they are about to auction off. Keep in mind, these art auctioneers are very skilled at what they are doing. In fact, they must attend intensive training courses that can last up to one month so that they can fine-tune their sales tactics. They are extremely talented 'smooth-talkers' to say the least.

Once they have the crowd motivated and convinced that purchasing art is the way to go, the actual auction itself begins. Unfortunately, however, the art auction is not as simple a procedure as it may at first appear.

While you think you are just bidding on pieces of original artwork, this is what is really going on around you:

- The first thing to consider is that almost every piece of art for sale at an on board art auction is not actually original artwork. You are actually bidding on 'lithographs' which are labeled as original art by the auctioneer even though hundreds or thousands of them have been printed off. Usually they come in limited editions, and sometimes with the artist's autograph, although there have been cases in the past where the autographs turned out to be fake.
- The jargon used to describe such categories of art is complicated, but the important thing to remember is that they are not actual, original pieces of art. They are basically fancy posters! So don't spend thousands on a Salvador Dali being sold on board a ship as you can probably find the exact same lithograph on the internet for a fraction of the price. (On a side note, there are a few cruise ships that do auction off original art from time to time. However, this is definitely not the norm. The only times I have seen actual original art being auctioned, is when the artist themselves have been on board as well. Therefore, it is always best to assume that the art for sale is only a duplicate of the original.)
- Before the auction begins, the art auctioneer will always explain to the crowd, in very complicated and rapid phrases, that they will be using a tactic known as 'shilling'. However, since the auctioneer speaks in such clever and confusing, almost nobody will understand what is actually taking place. Basically, 'shilling' involves having several people (usually other passengers) placed in the audience by the auctioneer. Their job is to yell out whenever they receive the signal, and to make a bid on a piece of art. These bids are 'fake' and they are designed to get the bidding started as well as increase the amounts of each bid.
- Many times, when you are bidding on a piece of art, you think you are bidding against another passenger, but you are actually bidding against a 'fake' bid. This of course forces you to keep bidding higher! The passenger who is acting as the 'fake bidder' will usually receive a 'free' piece of art in exchange for their cooperation. However, if you are approached by the auctioneer to do this, think twice before you agree. It is not uncommon that when the 'fake- bidder' gets home and receives that 'free' piece of art as promised them, they also find an invoice for taxes and other fees totaling several hundred dollars as well.
- Passengers will generally not have an opportunity to view a copy of the sales contract before the bidding begins. As a result, what you bid on a piece of art will never be the final price that you will end up paying. And we are not talking about a few extra dollars being added on to the bill. Instead, you can expect a 10% buyer's premium (which is actually nothing but a way to get 10% more out of you), shipping & handling costs, framing fees, appraisal fees, sales tax on the total of all the above, and often another vague 'handling fee' added on after that. You can literally end up paying thousands of more dollars than what you bid. If you then decide that you don't want to pay all of those extra fees, the art auctioneer will usually point out that all sales are final (written in the small print somewhere) and that your credit card will automatically be charged.

- Most of the time, when you successfully bid on a piece of art, you will not actually receive the piece of art that you saw in front of you during the auction. For example, the largest auction house on board cruise ships only guarantees that a similar version of the art being bid on will be sent to the buyer. In most cases, the actual piece of art is in a warehouse and will be shipped to the passenger once they return home. This is another fact that makes one wonder how original pieces of art could be in two places at the same time!
- Art auctioneers working on board cruise ships are not usually licensed as actual art auctioneers. They are not required to be since they do not have to follow the legal codes found on land. So you can definitely classify an on board art auctioneer as more of a salesman/saleswoman than an actual certified art professional.
- Each piece of art for sale must be appraised. However, those for sale at a cruise ship auction can be appraised by anyone. And that is usually what happens. For example, the largest art auction house operating on cruise ships has every piece of art they sell appraised by the owner of the auction house himself! They do not use a certified and independent appraiser at all. As you can imagine, given their direct interest in earning money from the artwork they sell, they can virtually claim that a piece of art is worth as much as they want to say it is worth. How convenient!
- If you decide to participate in an art auction, you are usually asked, or even required, to complete a 'registration form' before the auction starts. This is really just a way to obtain your credit card information so that as soon as you successfully bid on a piece of art, the charges can be automatically applied to your credit card. Art auctioneers do not want the charges to be put onto your on board account. By avoiding this method, a buyer will not actually see the total charges (with all of the added fees thrown in) until they receive the final invoice that arrives with the piece of art once they get home.
- You will almost never find any documents of authenticity or other information prior to the start of a cruise ship art auction. Of course, having this information would be useful by allowing you to learn as much as you can ahead of time about any piece of art you are interested in. Instead, you are forced to blindly bid on artwork that you cannot confirm is authentic or as 'valuable' as the art auctioneer claims it to be. If they can't provide the documentation, you should definitely be suspicious. If they do provide you with some 'official' paperwork, look it over as closely as possible and read every single line.

Keep in mind that most of the above would violate US laws and regulations regarding the manner in which art auctions may be held. But again, since these auctions do not answer to the United States (or any other) legal system, they are able to get around almost every rule, forcing anyone to conclude that the ethics of such art auctions are quite questionable.

In the end, passengers have been spending thousands and thousands of dollars simply by being convinced that they are making an 'investment of a lifetime'. When they find out that what they bought is worth nowhere near the amount they paid, it is too late.

If you want to avoid having this happen to you, it's best to take the free champagne and just walk away...or not even go near the auction in the first place.

Have a read through this story... you may find it quite interesting.

On one cruise ship I worked on, I knew the art auctioneer quite well and I will never forget this story that he told me.

Our ship was about to finish its Caribbean season and head out to Hawaii for two months of voyages. One day, we were docked in New York City for the final time before making the transition to the Pacific Ocean. On this day, while walking through Chinatown in Manhattan, the art auctioneer came across a small shop that was selling a Spongebob Squarepants doll. (Spongebob Squarepants is a television cartoon popular with young children – he looks like a square sponge naturally).

However, the doll in this shop was not an ordinary doll. This particular Spongebob Squarepants was holding a sign that read “Aloha” on it. The art auctioneer bought this doll for \$5 USD.

About 3 weeks later, our ship finally reached Hawaii and we began our first Hawaiian cruise of the season. During the first art auction, the auctioneer actually brought out the Spongebob Squarepants doll and put it on the auction block. He told the crowd, in his persuasive and convincing manner, that this was a ‘limited edition’, ‘one-of-a-kind’ version of this doll that was hand-crafted especially for this auction.

It sold for \$450. All he did was tear off the “Made in China” label and it was ready to be auctioned off.

This is exactly what you are up against when you take a seat at a cruise ship art auction.

Bonus Reports

(more tips, advice & insider insight)



A Farewell To Ship Life

(a personal story of what happens behind the scenes on a cruise ship)

A good friend and ex-colleague of mine has offered to share his thoughts on his four years of cruise ship employment. The following is an article he has written to describe the underworld that is commonly referred to as 'ship life' and involves everything that takes place behind the scenes and behind those 'crew only' doors. More importantly, it offers an interesting glimpse into the mind of a cruise ship employee who is forced to battle between the positive and negative aspects of spending so much time living and working at sea.

I hope you'll enjoy his story...

A Farewell to 'Ship Life'

My bedroom no longer sways in the night and I no longer work to the melodies of a three-piece Latvian orchestra in the background. Oddly enough, I now seem to wake up each morning in the same location where I fell asleep the night before. Nobody is cleaning my room every day, washing my windows (which have now transformed from round to square shaped), dictating what clothes I need to wear. If I am going to be late for something, I no longer have to make an announcement throughout the entire community where I live, informing thousands of people to expect some delays in my arrival.

'Ship life' is the term used by all the thousands of cruise ship crew members worldwide to describe the unique lifestyle that defines the entire essence of our existence. Whether working on board a 150,000 ton, 3000 passenger ocean liner or a 500 passenger ultra-luxury ship, 'ship life' involves the rules, both written and unwritten, the interactions of several hundred crew members representing over fifty nationalities, the late nights in the crew bar and the fish head soup (popular among the large Filipino segment of the workforce), the fake smiles and 'good afternoon madams', the cabin inspections, the security screenings, the consistently failing relationships. Nepalese security guards, Ukrainian dancers, Filipino deck hands, Colombian carpenters, Canadian entertainment staff, Italian officers, South African hair stylists, Moldovan bartenders – everyone survives in an unfathomable underworld that rules every second of how we live and work.

'Ship life' is also what I have just left behind. Do I miss it? Of course I do. It is a sense of community that I do not think is possible to experience any where else on this planet. But, just like many of those who live in the underworlds that exist on land, I had to leave it behind before 'ship life' became the 'only life' I would know.

I will admit that as a crew member I was spoiled. I would fall asleep in Barcelona and wake up in Athens, with the process simply repeating itself over and over again while the destinations constantly shifted from St. Lucia to Curacao to Hawaii to Quebec City to Rome to Dubai, Malta, Norway, Kuala Lumpur, Samoa and on and on.

Over the last two years of my ship career my actual job was that of Shore Excursion Manager, responsible for all aspects of the land tours we offered our guests in the various ports of call. I dealt

with hundreds of local tour operators all over the world who treated me well, almost too well. After all, I ran the department that sold their tours and therefore controlled the flow of money that ended up in their pockets. Whenever I wanted (or perhaps a friend or someone I needed to impress wanted!) to swim with the dolphins in the Caribbean, ride a helicopter over the active volcano in Hawaii, visit the ruins of Petra or sail to a secluded Greek island, I simply asked and instantly received.

In addition, my team and I were treated to gourmet meals, beach parties, private tours and unlimited rental cars, surfboards, resort passes and more, the cost of which was always taken care of by these tour operators. Seldom was it even discussed, it simply was the norm. During the Christmas holiday season we were truly spoiled, much to the envy of the other crew members, as we would return to the ship in the afternoon carrying endless bottles of champagne and wine, gift certificates, even iPods and \$300 Maui Jim sunglasses.

Some would say that my team and I had the best positions on the ship. I would not for an instant disagree.

I did earn my salary though, having to work extremely hard, seldom less than 10 hours a day and every now and then up to 16 hours, without a day off for the entire six month contract. The pressure bordered on extreme in regards to both exceeding revenue goals and ensuring the thousands of guests on tour remained happy. As a result, in between my paperwork, constant work emailing and handling of guest issues, I usually only managed a few hours off in each port, sometimes just enough for a quick stroll or swim, a bike ride or some surfing, simple activities to maintain the last remnants of my sanity.

Crew members always joke to each other that the best times off the ship are simply when the ship itself is not in sight. A day spent on a beach with the ship still in view is pointless and better spent on 'metal beach', the crew sunbathing area on the topmost deck of the vessel. For those that can get far enough away in order to truly release the day's frustrations, they undoubtedly enjoy an extremely valuable period of time. But once you re-enter the port gates at the end of your day, and you wipe the sand from between your toes, that first glimpse of the ship forces a dreaded yet necessary alteration in mindset. Back to the routine, back to the 'ship life.'

As time passed on board and one six month contract became another six month contract and then another, it began to wear me down. I began to question my reasons for being on board more frequently, I dreamt of going to the movies, having a normal relationship and standing in a bathroom bigger than the toilet it holds. When a new contract commenced, I would be fueled by a fierce motivation to make it my most productive and rewarding contract ever. But once the first two months would pass, this fire always began to wane, as I realized once again that this contract would be just like all the others. I then struggled through the final two months, cursing and vowing that I will never return, counting the days until vacation time, that moment when I can finally send my uniforms back down to the linen keeper for storage.

I always ran down the gangway when vacation arrived, as we all do, to get as far away from the impossibly long days as possible and to put the lack of a normal social life, that often drove me to stare at the walls of my bland cabin in a state of boredom, behind me. No more late arrivals to port, no more tasteless food, no more mandatory crew life boat drills that seemed to always take place on the mornings when I finally had time to go to the beach.

For the first two weeks of vacation I relaxed at home, adjusting to a new world where I had absolutely nothing to do at all. But then, after visiting family and friends, taking a short trip to Mexico or Europe, I

suddenly always found myself less than a week away from my return date to the ship and without having found another job.

By this point, I am quite predictably no longer able to recall the frustrations, the boredom, the furious passenger who screamed at me for an hour because it rained during his tour of St. Thomas or the intensity of my work on board. I can now only remember the good times and how my bank account grows each month by not having any expenses whatsoever. And so I convince myself, 'The days were not so long, I had plenty of free time. I can handle the constant problems, it wasn't so bad. What a wonderful social life! The wine & cheese nights, the crew parties, the movie nights, the open-deck crew barbeques. Besides, this contract I will go to the gym and socialize more in the crew bar and I'll finally write that book I always wanted to write. I won't be bored at all.'

One week later I am walking up the gangway again, under a stupor of self-deceit, shouting my 'Namastes' and 'Ciaos' and 'Hola chicas' to those crew I recognize.

After this process repeated itself for four years, the notion of sinking deeper and deeper into this extended life at sea, causing me to be ever more distant from my friends and family, grew more unappealing. When viewed realistically, apart from the steady income, this job was leading me nowhere, except to more and more future contracts on a floating world of isolation. The balance of what I enjoyed versus what I missed on land had begun to change drastically.

Gathering up all of my courage, I recently resigned from my position, following that strong inner urge to head in a new direction.

In one phone call to the head office, my ship life came to an end. I left behind the management meetings that discussed such pressing and stimulating topics as the need for special technicians to remove the semen and blood stains from the sheets and the severe shortage of lamb and salmon for the upcoming voyage. I left behind the constant intestinal illness notification emails from the medical department, informing me of which crew members had a case of uncontrollable diarrhea and were now confined to their cabins for twenty-four hours.

Now that six weeks has passed since my resignation, and I remain confident that this was a sound decision, I can admit that I do miss certain aspects. But ship life does not allow you to have one foot at sea and one foot on land; you must definitively choose one or the other. For years I was unable to decide and so 'ship life' chose for me, as it does for most of those working on board. What I do miss has nothing to do with my position or the tour operators that gave me such a royal treatment wherever I went around the globe. Instead, I long for the underworld that 'ship life' represents. For months at a time, hard work and hard fun intermixed with allegiances and alliances, secret lives and special favors. As in many other spheres of life, a successful existence on board depends on 'who you know'. Without favorable connections, little gets accomplished and few problems are resolved to your liking.

The on board crew mafias operate vital black markets that control a wide range of items, from printing services to dry cleaning to phone cards to alcohol to snorkeling expeditions and fresh fruit. Catamaran tours were traded for sushi platters, alcohol was sold at inflated rates by certain crew after the bars had closed, entrepreneurial chefs delivered filet mignon and twin lobsters to crew cabins for a small 'fee'. Money was actually rarely used, with favors that enhanced one's life on board usually acting as the preferred currency.

In such an environment, the appeal is great; everyone has a chance to be a superstar, to live the life of a gangster. I traveled the world, building bonds on many continents and within the vessel itself, both friendships and enemies alike. I had the power to make miracles happen (to send crew to the Sistine Chapel or the Pyramids for free on the passenger tours) and likewise to destroy dreams (deny crew the opportunity to see the places we visited) within our confined and unique community. The potential rewards of such a lifestyle are immense - the money, the status, the fantasy.

It starts out as honest work, but the essence of 'ship life' reverberates throughout your being, so effectively igniting that innate instinct to not only look after yourself and your interests but to improve the conditions of your life. Working on board a cruise ship you can choose to hide in the background or try your hand at ruling the world.

Now, when I try to fall asleep each night, the strong winds cause the willow trees outside my window to sway, leaving my room itself completely unaffected by its gusts. Although I no longer wish to float upon the seven seas, I still close my eyes in the hopes of fading into some sort of familiar dream, perhaps one in which the white sands stretch forever, the money flows and the world is my home.

Don't Say Goodbye To Your Luggage

Although it is an unfortunate truth, it must be admitted that theft plays a role in the cruise industry. Usually, it involves crew members taking items out of passengers' luggage, either on embarkation or disembarkation day.

While it is not something that is rampant or even very common, it does take place. And in most cases, theft is very hard to prove, especially considering how many different people will potentially handle your luggage when it is not in your possession.

On the first day of your cruise, your car/taxi/bus will be met at the pier by a team of ground baggage handlers who will load up your suitcases and transport them to the ship. You will then head off in a different direction to check-in for your cruise and then board the vessel from a different area. You can then expect your luggage to be delivered to your cabin at some point during that first afternoon.

Transferring thousands of pieces of luggage from the pier to the ship and then to the proper cabins is a massive undertaking. Your luggage will literally be handled by dozens of people en route. While most of the handling takes place in busy, public areas (i.e. on the pier or in the main crew areas on board the ship), there are times when your luggage will be in an elevator, in a small holding room or left unattended as the crew members run around from duty to duty.

Of course, the overwhelming majority of crew members are honest people, working hard for the money they earn and not at all interested in doing anything illegal. However, the temptation of having so many pieces of luggage lying around is simply too much for a tiny minority of crew members to handle. As a result, suitcases are quickly unzipped when out of public view and things get stolen. It can take 3 seconds for this to occur and usually it is never seen by anyone except for the person committing the act.

Over the past decade, several 'theft rings' have even been discovered on several ships, where teams of crew members worked together, each with their own duty, to steal belongings from guests' luggage.

Almost every cruise involves a handful of guests visiting the Front Desk on the first day to complain that something has been taken out of their suitcase. Unfortunately, as mentioned above, this is very difficult to prove. Very rarely are the stolen goods found. As a result, most crew members involved with theft simply get away with it.

Theft can also occur on the final day of the cruise. Your luggage is taken from your stateroom the night before arrival at your port of disembarkation. It is then passed from crew member to crew member as they organize every piece of luggage to be off-loaded upon arrival the next morning. Once everything is in place, the luggage is left sitting out all night, sometimes under camera surveillance and sometimes not.

On many ships, when there is too much luggage to fit in the off-loading area, the excess baggage is simply stored in either a crew corridor or other common crew area. And these pieces are almost never supervised during that final night.

The biggest problem with theft on this final day is that passengers will usually not even discover that something is missing until they get home. And once hours or even days go by, it of course becomes much harder once again to prove that a theft actually did occur.

The idea is not to scare you but to make you aware of the situation so that you can make the best decision possible. Again, it is important to state that theft is not something that is considered to be very common and that 99% of crew members would never think of opening up your baggage.

So, here is our recommendation:

Consider taking your luggage on and off the ship with you on the first and last days of your cruise. Basically, avoid being separated from your luggage at all.

Not only does this instantly eliminate the risk of theft, but it also helps you avoid the uncertainty involved with waiting for your luggage to arrive in your cabin on embarkation day. By wheeling your luggage an extra 200 feet on to the ship, you will be rewarded with the ability to get your cruise off to the most relaxing and worry-free start possible. As the other passengers wait and worry, you will be out and about enjoying the ship from the very first minute.

In addition, if you choose to carry your own luggage off the ship with you on disembarkation day, you are able to disembark the ship at any time you want. You do not have to wait to be called off by your deck number because you do not have any luggage to collect on the pier. As a result, you can disembark at your leisure and then walk straight past the large crowds of hundreds of passengers who are searching around for their suitcases among a sea of luggage.

Of course, we do know that not everybody will be able to carry/wheel their luggage on and off the ship with them. So for those who do have to hand their luggage over to the crew members, here are a couple of steps you can take to reduce the risk of theft.

First, keep all valuables with you at all times. This includes jewelry, medicine, passport and credit card copies, electronic equipment and anything else you absolutely do not want to lose.

If possible, lock your luggage. If you are unable to do this, then tie a ribbon tightly around the entire suitcase. Anything that makes theft a more difficult will be a huge turn off for a potential thief.

It is also a good idea to take a photograph of the contents of your luggage before handing them over to the porters/ship's crew members. Make sure that the photo has both the date and the time on it. In the event that you discover something is missing, you can use this photograph to prove that you actually did have that item before being separated from your luggage.

There are many times when a guest claims that something was stolen only to find the item later on or realize that they never even took the item with them in the first place. By having a photograph available, the ship will be much more responsive to your claims as you have solid proof that something has actually gone missing.

While the various luggage transportation services that cruise lines offer (i.e. airport to ship, hotel to ship, pier to ship, etc.) seem to be the most efficient option, there is absolutely nothing that can beat the security and safety of keeping your luggage with you at all times.

Expert Tricks For A Hassle-Free Cruise

From Our Team of Senior Cruise Ship Officers

PART 1: BOOKING A CRUISE

1. Planning on being busy during your cruise? You might want to **consider booking an inside cabin**. These are often half the price of 'ocean view' or 'balcony' cabins and well worth the savings if you plan to use your cabin only to sleep, shower and change clothes.
2. **Before booking a cabin, review its location.** You might want to be near certain places (i.e. restaurants, pools, dining rooms, etc.) but away from areas that might present noise issues (i.e. nightclub, under the kitchen, near the anchor) or other problems (in rough weather, forward cabins are most affected). The best way to review a location is to check the online deck plans before confirming your booking.
3. The **best deals on cruise fares** can be found three ways. Booking as early as possible, searching for last minute deals or traveling either just before or immediately after the high seasons. The rates will be lower during these times and just might include a whole list of extra bonuses (i.e. complimentary upgrades, on board credit, free transfers to/from the ship) aimed at sweetening the deal.
4. **Ask for a discount!** Cruise lines offer a variety of discounts that are not often advertised, including those for military personnel, government workers, group leaders & shareholders.
5. Purchase your own airfare. **Avoid buying airfare through the cruise lines** as their fares tend to be much higher than what you can easily find on the internet or through a reliable travel agent. Along the same line, take a taxi to/from the ship whether you are coming from an airport or a city center. The cruise ship-arranged transportation is more expensive, involves more travel time due to the use of large motor coaches and requires you to spend time waiting for other passengers.

PART 2: PREPARATIONS

6. **If you do not travel often, call your credit card company** before leaving home. You don't want them to become suspicious and put a protective hold on your card while you are trying to purchase souvenirs & gifts in foreign lands. Tell them where you will be and when so they know it is you doing the spending.
7. Make plenty of copies. **Photocopy your IDs, passport & credit cards.** Keep one set in your cabin safe and email scanned copies to yourself so that you can access at any time.
8. **Call your medical insurance company** before departing and find out exactly what is covered while you are away. More importantly, ask what documentation you would need to provide (from both the ship & port) for any reimbursements. Keep detailed notes for future reference if needed.

9. Don't take an entire Caribbean guide book on a 7-day voyage. **Photocopy only the pages that are relevant** and then leave the bulk of the weight at home. Remember, most airlines are charging new fees for luggage, so reducing luggage weight is more important than ever.
10. Regardless of the class of cabin you book, it is always a possibility that there will be noise that might keep you awake at night. After all, you will be sleeping on board a massive, metal, floating mega-resort. You might hear wind, vibrations & rattling, loud neighbors, banging doors and possibly music from the disco. **Ear plugs are a very useful item.**
11. You'll certainly need some money for this trip, so be sure to get organized before you leave home and **take as much money with you as you think you will spend**. US Dollars are widely accepted almost everywhere in the Caribbean and Central America but beware of those hefty ATM fees both on board the ship and in foreign ports.

PART 3: PACKING

12. If it's all in one place you don't have to worry. **Take a clear, #10 envelope-sized document holder and fill it with all of your important documents** - cruise paperwork, passport, travel insurance information, copy of excursion reservations, list of credit card numbers, list of telephone numbers for banks, credit card companies, friends & family as well as business cards to give to new friends.
13. Too many pieces of luggage look the same these days. **Make your luggage stand out** (tie a colored ribbon around the handles perhaps) so that it will be easier to locate at the airport and in the baggage hall on the final day.
14. **Bring a waterproof pouch** to hold your money & credit cards, passport, camera, etc. when going ashore, especially if you plan to visit beaches or take any tours that involve water activities or transportation by boat.
15. The first photographs you should take on your vacation are of your luggage. **Take photos of each piece of your luggage at the airport** before checking in. In the event of loss or damage, this will act as perfect proof of your belongings or what the airline should be looking for.
16. **Bring a travel-size alarm clock** as most cabins do not have them. Wake up calls can be organized through your cabin phone system of course but having an alarm clock next to your bed is much more convenient than having to go across the room to pick up and hang up the phone. Especially if you want to keep pressing snooze!
17. A **small first aid kit** containing bandages, cold medicine & headache tablets will save you from paying high rates at the medical center in the case of a minor cut or illness.
18. Make a packing list of items that you need to bring on your cruise. Unlike a land-based vacation, **once the ship leaves port it might be quite difficult or expensive to find any important items** that you may have left behind.

19. **Bring a package of Post-It Notes** so that you can easily jot down any requests or notes for your cabin steward/ess. This establishes a simple system that ensures there won't be any mis-communication.
20. Take **one large insulated mug per person** with you on your cruise. Fill them up with coffee in the mornings (they will be much bigger and more secure than the cups on board) and then use them to carry around water from the water fountains (this water is cleaner than most bottled waters!)
21. **Pack a can of air freshener**, especially if traveling on an older ship. Odors resulting from such issues as plumbing system backups can be most unpleasant, as can other odors resulting from recent painting work, poor ventilation systems, left over smoke smell, etc.
22. It might seem obvious, but **do not bring any weapons, illegal drugs, tools, very expensive watches, large gems** or any other items that might rouse suspicion, either with on board security or during a customs inspection upon your return to the USA. Contact your cruise line directly for specific information about what is not allowed.
23. If you need to bring all of your toys (i.e. camera, laptop, cell phone) with you on vacation, **consider bringing a power strip** so that you can recharge them all when needed. Cabins usually have limited plug outlets and often not in very convenient locations.
24. For those of you planning to take a lot of jewelry, you should carry it all in a **portable jewelry case**. Keep this case locked in your cabin safe and instantly reduce the risk of losing anything. You can also check each night that everything is secure & safely in place.
25. **A small reading light** will allow you to read without affecting anyone else in your cabin. Again, any effort to avoid disturbing your traveling companion(s) will undoubtedly be much appreciated, especially given the small size of most cabins. Similarly, a sleep mask might also be a good idea.
26. **Write a little each day.** Take a small notebook with you and record where you were & what you did each day. This helps identify photographs upon your return home and keeps those fond memories better preserved.
27. **Bring plenty of reading material** as you might end up relaxing even more than you thought – whether on the open decks, at the beach or in your cabin. If you are stricken with a stomach bug while on board, ship rules often dictate that you be quarantined in your cabin for up to 3 full days. You do not want to be stuck without any reading material if this should occur.

PART 4: EMBARKATION DAY

28. If you drink soda (or even water) it is best to **purchase some 2-liter bottles of your favorite soft drink before you embark the ship.** Prices for these items on board can range from slightly expensive to exorbitant.
29. Be the first to board. **Arrive at the ship approximately thirty minutes prior to the time boarding is scheduled to begin.** This allows you to avoid long lines and it enables you to check your cabin & dining room arrangements before everyone else. Plus, enjoy a relaxed lunch on board without any crowds.
30. **Inspect your cabin thoroughly upon arrival** and make sure you receive what you paid for. If something is not right, immediately contact your cabin steward/ess for any small problems or the Reception Desk for larger issues. Ships do keep spare cabins in case of major problems, but you would need to make the ship aware of your issue as early as possible.
31. Visit the main dining room shortly after boarding and **check your seating arrangement with the maitre'd.** This is the best time to make any changes (i.e. dining times, table size, table location) as the longer you wait, the less of a chance you will have to be accommodated.
32. Safety first! Despite being an unexciting event, **be sure to attend the passenger life boat drill on the first day.** Although the chance of an emergency is more than remote, in the event of such a situation, its best that you know exactly where you should go & what you should do.
33. If you are entitled to on board credits, **check with the Reception Desk on the first day in order to make sure the proper amount of credits has been applied to your account.** Bring any paperwork that details the amount of credit you should have. If you do have on board credits, use them. Many times the credit is forfeited if left unused.
34. Make sure you **attend the “Spa Tour”** on the first day as the spa staff usually choose random passengers in order to demonstrate their treatments and massages for free!

PART 5: CABINS

35. Be careful who you call from your cabin. **Ship to shore phone calls can cost anywhere from \$4 - \$15 per minute.** It is best to use your cell phone or a phone card when in port to make your phone calls home. However, if you can find a crew member willing to get you a crew phone or internet card, you will save up to 75% on what the ship charges passengers for these services.
36. **Drink from the tap in your cabin** – the crew do! With the modern purification technology in place on all modern fleets, you have nothing to worry about. You can imagine the liability issues cruise lines would face if the water was undrinkable. The price of the unopened bottle of water on the table should scare you more than the water from the tap.

PART 6: DINING

37. Unless you don't want to meet other guests, **avoid requesting a table for 2 in the dining room**. These tables are often located in the back of the dining room or stuck into corners and other undesirable locations. Besides, larger tables provide the perfect opportunity to mingle with and meet other guests.
38. 'Formal', 'Informal', 'Elegant Casual', 'Casual', 'Resort Casual' – what does it all mean? **Read the cruise literature carefully in regards to dress code**. Many ships refuse entry into the dining rooms if guests are not dressed appropriately.

PART 7: SHIP ACTIVITIES

39. **Visit the pools or spa when the ship is in port** and you will often have them all to yourself. While everyone else is off the ship, you get your own private resort for a few hours.
40. Bring out the highlighter! **Review the daily newsletter** you receive each evening and mark the activities/classes/events that you want to attend the next day. Always carry the newsletter around with you as everything you need to know is right there in its pages.
41. If you are traveling with children, **check with the children's program coordinator on the first day**. Each ship has their own scheduled times for watching children and rules about how long they will watch them for. The hours may not always coincide with the times that you wish to go ashore.
42. Even though you might not be interested in taking one of the computer-related classes that the ship offers, you could always **sign up for a computer class and then just surf the internet and send emails instead** of following along. This is one way to avoid paying the expensive internet fees on board!

PART 8: GENERAL ADVICE

43. For those of you that suffer from seasickness (or if you think you might), **bring your own seasickness pills/patches with you**. The Reception Desk usually has seasickness remedies, as does the medical center on board, but they will be sure to charge you for them.
44. **What is not included in your cruise fare?** With the exception of a few ships, soft drinks, alcoholic beverages, meals at the alternate dining restaurants, photographs taken by ship photographers, internet access & shore excursions are not included. In addition, although good deals & good entertainment definitely can be had, beware of the aggressive selling tactics on board and try to avoid parting with more money than you can afford.
45. If you do pre-book any of the ship's shore excursions, it is important that you **visit the on board Tour Office on the first day** and confirm that your bookings have been made correctly. Bring any paperwork that you may have as well as any booking numbers that show exactly what you had booked ahead of time.

46. **Sanitize and sanitize often.** Wash your hands and use hand sanitizer as frequently as possible, especially before & after eating, using the restroom or touching anything that has been touched by many other passengers. Germs can spread quickly in such an enclosed environment and the best method of protection is to make sure your hands are always clean. Pack sufficient hand sanitizer and be sure to have both a large bottle to use in your cabin and smaller bottles that you can carry around with you on board and ashore.
47. A cruise ship is an excellent place to network and you should **try to meet as many new people as possible.** Not only do friendships and even relationships form on board ships, but worthwhile business connections and contacts can be found as well. You never know who you might be talking to.
48. No trip will be perfect. However, **your outlook can greatly affect the enjoyment of your cruise.** Patience, tolerance and the understanding that your ship is trying to cater to every single passenger, all of whom have different needs, will undoubtedly reduce any frustration that may arise from minor disappointments or situations. A positive attitude, sense of humor and desire to relax will help ensure a rewarding vacation.
49. **Do you want to keep the price a secret?** If you want to buy a gift on board for your significant other but do not want them to know how much you spent, contact the Reception Desk as soon as you make the purchase. They can usually 'hide' the charges from the printed statement you will receive at the end of the voyage.
50. Keep track of the other members of your party with **a set of simple, cheap walkie-talkies.** These little devices will make it easy to communicate from every area of the ship and given the fact that ships are getting bigger and bigger in size, this can be a huge time and frustration saver.
51. **Be careful when sending your photographs** to be developed or printed! Whatever is on your film/memory card will be seen by the crew members working in the photography department (and potentially other crew members as well). If you don't want them to see something, don't send it off to be processed.
52. **Never turn on your cell phone** without asking your cell phone company about their **roaming charges.** While some companies/plans include phone calls and text messages to/from regions in the Caribbean, it pays to always check as roaming charges are often exorbitant.
53. On many ships **you can use the Spa's steam rooms, saunas and showers** without having to pay for a treatment.

PART 9: ON BOARD ISSUES

54. A polite, calm manner is the best approach when making any complaints on board. The crew deal with hundreds of guests every day and **a smiling face, even when relating a complaint, is much more welcome** and sure to receive assistance. Give the ship a reasonable amount of time to fix your issue and if it remains unresolved, ask to speak to someone in a senior position. As frustrating as the situation may become, the crew will be infinitely more responsive to a polite complainer.
55. In the event that your issue is not resolved while on board the ship, **ask for a Guest Relations card before you leave**. Send a letter/email upon your return home and if you had a genuinely bad experience, the cruise line will want to try and rectify the situation. They may offer a credit on a future voyage or even a partial refund of what you paid for your recent cruise.

PART 10: GOING ASHORE

56. When going ashore, **take a small bag** that contains such items as a small first aid kit, bug repellent, sunscreen, small umbrella, travel roll of toilet paper, hand sanitizer & extra supply of medication.
57. **Always take the daily newsletter with you** when going ashore. This will have the details for the ship's local port agent who is in constant contact with the ship throughout the day. In the event of a medical emergency, vehicle accident or unexpected delay that might cause you to arrive late to the ship, you should contact the port agent immediately. They will relay all of the information directly to the ship.
58. **Avoid the pier.** If you need to grab a bite to eat or even send a few emails from an Internet Cafe, you'll typically find that the cafes and shops 2 or 3 blocks away from the pier will cost 50% less than that shops right next to the ship.

PART 11: FINANCES

59. A couple of days before the end of the cruise **ask the Reception Desk to provide you with a printed copy of your on board account statement**. Review it carefully. If you want to dispute or question a charge, you will need to visit the Reception Desk and if you want to avoid those long lines, it is advisable not to wait until the final morning to sort out any issues.
60. It is best to **register a credit card as your method of payment** and not an ATM/debit card. As the cruise line will place a hold on your card, it is better to have that hold on your credit and not your actual bank account. Once the cruise ship receives authorization from your credit card company (this usually occurs relatively quickly after presenting the card to the check-in staff), you will be free to spend away.

61. If the ship informs you that there is a problem with your credit card that you need to resolve directly with your credit card company or bank, **visit the Reception Desk before making any phone calls**. They may give you the option of calling the number on the back of your credit card directly from their desk and therefore save you from having to use the expensive satellite connection from your cabin.
62. By signing the pre-authorization slip at the beginning of the cruise (usually when you check in), **you won't need to sign anything at the end**. If you agree with the charges on the final invoice that you receive on the last night, the total amount will be automatically charged to your credit card.

PART 12: DISEMBARKATION

63. Don't walk off the ship in your underwear! If you plan on collecting your luggage outside the ship or having it sent directly to the airport, **be sure that you have all your important items** (passport, credit cards, extra clothes, etc.) before being separated from your luggage on the last night.
64. **Express disembarkation is the easiest way to leave the ship** on the final day. This does require you to carry your entire luggage off of the ship yourself on the final morning. But it also allows you to leave at whatever time you want and to avoid searching for your luggage among the thousands of others in the baggage hall outside.



Fly For Free Starting Today

What is the best way to take a flight without having to pay for it? The answer: Credit cards that give you frequent flyer miles.

I'm not talking about using a credit card to buy lots of things and saving up for years in order to get a free flight. That's not a terrible plan, but it's certainly not the best because it takes too long and you'll be playing right into the hands of the credit card companies.

The goal here isn't to rack up any kind of credit card debt. It's to get frequent flyer miles as fast as possible. So forget about receiving 1 mile for every \$1 you spend.

Instead, focus on the mileage bonuses that new cardholders receive when signing up for a new credit card. These bonuses, sometimes as much as 25,000 free miles, have nothing to do with changing your spending habits or having to make several major purchases.

First, you need to pick a frequent flyer program from a major airline, making sure that the airline you choose operates from the airport you use most. If you already have frequent flyer miles racked up from previous flights, then your first look should be to that program, as that will require a lot less effort on your part to get the mileage you need.

Then, follow these simple instructions:

- Start several months before you're due to travel in order to make sure you have enough time to accumulate the necessary miles and book the flight.
- Go to the airline's website and find out what kind of credit card offers they are currently making.
- Find out how many frequent flyer miles are required to obtain a free flight on that airline.
- Apply for the credit cards (it's best to apply for 2 in order to accumulate the miles as fast as possible) that give you the miles. Aim for credit cards that offer at least 20,000 free miles just for signing up. You can often get an additional bonus of 5,000 or 10,000 miles just by adding an additional name to the account.
- Stay clear of credit cards that charge high annual fees whenever possible. As the idea here is to use the credit cards to obtain free miles to be used for a free flight and to then get rid of the cards, annual fees are unneeded out of pocket costs. If there's a significant mileage bonus attached, though, it might be worth it.
- Minimize purchase requirements. If a card has a minimum spending requirement, simply buy something that you would ordinarily have to pay for. For example, if you need to spend \$250 to receive the free bonus miles, then buy a gift certificate at the supermarket or gas station that you use most often. This way, you will not be wasting any money at all.

- Once you've fulfilled the requirements (usually time and/or money) and you have the points/miles credited to your account, cancel the card(s) immediately.
- You can then go ahead and book your free flight as the miles will now be loaded into your airline's frequent flyer account ready to be used.

Things to consider:

- Miles don't last forever, so plan a trip well in advance, and use the miles before they're gone.
- Your credit score could be affected so if you simply can't handle the effects of one or two more cards, then it's best not to do it.
- It can become very easy to continue using these credit cards after you receive your free bonus miles. So be careful! I strongly recommend canceling and cutting up the credit cards as soon as the miles are credited to your airline account.
- There are blackout dates for free flights so again, you want to do some advance planning and book your flights as early as possible.

Free Flowers In Your Cabin

Cruise lines are notorious for the amount of garbage they create. Excess food, piles of paper, cardboard, office supplies, computer equipment, furniture, etc. are thrown away every single day.

And even beautiful flowers are tossed straight into the garbage bins!

Cruise ships want to maintain the best appearance at all times and this usually involves keeping the flowers displayed throughout the ship as fresh as they possibly can. Some cruise lines even replace the flowers daily.

Of course, fresh flowers last a lot longer than a mere 12-24 hours. But once they have been taken away from the public areas, there is no where else to put them except in the trash.

As a passenger, you should visit the ship's florist at some point during your cruise. On some ships the florist is an actual shop while on others it is a small room tucked away in a corner of the ship. Regardless, they are almost always located in a passenger area, making them accessible to everyone.

Ask the florist if there are any flowers that they're about to throw away and if you could take them instead of seeing them go to waste. It's really that easy as there is generally no reason for the florist to refuse your request. Of course, handing him/her a small tip for their generosity will go even farther in getting you a floral arrangement that otherwise would have cost you up to \$100.

It is in the florist's interest to earn some extra cash by giving away flowers that he/she can no longer use instead of throwing the flowers away and earning nothing for them.

Just like that, you can find yourself walking away with a perfect bouquet, ready to be displayed in your stateroom or given to your significant other.

Crew members are doing this all the time, and you will find that many crew cabins are filled with day old flowers.

It's really a ridiculously easy and inexpensive method that can add a lot of color and brightness to one's day and to your vacation in general!

How To Get A Free Cabin Upgrade Even If The Ship Is Full

After spending one full day on board your cruise ship, it will not be difficult to determine whether or not the ship is completely full. Basically, if you are on a 2500 passenger ship and you never experience any lines, have no trouble making dinner or spa reservations and find that there are plenty of free deck chairs available in the middle of a warm sunny day, chances are that the ship is not 100% filled to capacity.

If this is the case, it doesn't hurt to simply go to the Front Desk and ask about the possibility of obtaining a cabin upgrade. If there are cabins available, cruise lines have no reason to keep them empty.

Of course, almost 10 times out of 10, you will find a sign on the Front Desk informing you in bold letters that "The ship is full and there are no available cabins." But don't let this turn you off. This is actually a permanent sign that is placed on the Front Desk every single voyage, regardless of whether or not the ship is really full.

The idea is to simply reduce the number of passengers making cabin upgrade requests.

A ship will never sail with every single cabin occupied and there are a number of reasons why this happens:

1. As in the hotel industry, certain cabins will be 'Out of Service' at the start of a voyage due to either major or minor issues. However, the crew is constantly working to fix these issues so it is not uncommon for an 'Out of Service' cabin to suddenly become available a few days into the voyage.
2. Quite often, the ship is unable to accommodate all of their crew members in the crew cabins. Sometimes the ship is over-staffed, there may be an odd number of male/females or there isn't an officer cabin available for an officer. If any of these situations occur, the ship will utilize some guest cabins in order to sort things out. However, there are crew members joining the ship and leaving for vacation in almost every port of call, so this situation can also change. As a result, a cabin might become available that was being used by crew at the start of the voyage.
3. There are always extra cabins available. Usually, these are kept available in order to accommodate any guests who experience major problems with their original cabins (i.e. leaky plumbing, unusual noise, broken locks, etc.) or for guests who complain endlessly until their demands for a better cabin are met. Again, if there are no major issues then these cabins will remain unused and as the voyage goes on, the ship will become more willing to 'give them away'.

In order to have the best chance of securing a complimentary cabin upgrade, I suggest following these steps:

1. Ask a receptionist at the Front Desk to make an appointment for you to speak with the person in charge of Guest Services.
2. When meeting with the Guest Services representative, spend a few minutes praising the ship, the crew members and your overall experience thus far. Explain that you wanted to make sure your positive comments went straight to someone of authority.
3. As politely and nonchalantly as possible, ask if there is any way to get a cabin upgrade or to at least be placed on the cabin upgrade request list.
4. It helps to explain that you were not able to get the cabin of your choice when making your cruise booking or if you're celebrating a birthday, anniversary, 50th cruise, etc., be sure to mention that as well.
5. Thank the Guest Services representative for their time and leave it at that.

The Guest Services rep spends most of his/her time listening to irate guests screaming and yelling, demanding and complaining directly in their face. Their job overwhelmingly involves dealing with negative and intensely stressful situations.

By spending a few minutes offering your positive feedback, you will be a most welcome break from the norm and will therefore stand out quite distinctly in his/her mind. You have no idea the impact that this will make on their day!

Usually, the Guest Services rep will then add you to his/her list of guests requesting a cabin upgrade.

A couple of days into the voyage (and every day thereafter), they will review their log book and determine whether or not to upgrade anybody. It is far more beneficial for the cruise line to fill their best cabins and make a handful of guests extremely happy in the process than it is to keep these cabins empty.

Of course, standing out as the most positive guests the Guest Services rep has met with in days or even weeks, will put you at a much greater advantage over others who chose to scream and shout.

One afternoon, after returning from a dip in the pool or a day in port, you just might find a telephone message from the Guest Services rep offering to have you upgraded for the remainder of your voyage!

How To Have A Blast In The Caribbean... At The Least Expense

If you are reading this, it means that you want to become a more educated cruise ship passenger when it comes to spending your time in the beautiful ports of call that you will visit on your itinerary.

There is an increasing trend with cruise ship passengers – more and more are choosing to explore each port independently, opting not to take the organized tours arranged by the cruise lines. As more and more passengers become better educated about the abundance of alternatives that are available, they are realizing just how easy and risk-free it is to explore independently. The best part is – every single person that has chosen this path has saved money! And in most cases, they have saved a lot of it, especially when compared to the prices the cruise lines charge for their excursions.

So here we are, ready to show how you can take advantage of these alternatives as well, and join the thousands of other cruise ship passengers who are saving time, hassle and money using this same method. This is the only step-by-step Do-It-Yourself manual available that helps ensure you get to do the activities that you want to do, find the simplest and most cost-effective method of doing so and benefit from the most rewarding experiences possible.

Enjoy!

The Team at the Intelligent Cruiser

THE METHOD

- Step #1: Choose Your Interests
- Step #2: Plan a Budget
- Step #3: Know Your Itinerary
- Step #4: What & Where
- Step #5: Matching Game
- Step #6: Narrow the Options
- Step #7: What Each Activity Involves
- Step #8: Tour Options
- Step #9: Make a Plan

STEP 1: CHOOSE YOUR INTERESTS

- There are endless options of places to go and things to do in the Caribbean! Review the below list of activities/interests and circle/highlight each one that catches your attention as something you might want to explore during your upcoming cruise. Try to focus only on the activities that you would regret not doing on your next vacation.

- aquarium
- atv adventure
- beach
- bicycling
- catamaran cruise
- cave exploration
- cooking class
- glass bottom boat / semi-submarine
- golfing
- helicopter tour
- hiking
- history/culture/museums
- horseback riding
- jeep safari
- kayaking
- natural wonders / eco-adventure
- party cruise
- rainforests
- river tubing
- rum tasting / brewery visit
- scuba diving
- shopping
- sightseeing
- snorkeling
- sport fishing
- submarine
- swimming with dolphins
- swimming with stingrays
- swimming with turtles
- tropical gardens
- waterfalls
- water sports / parasailing / jet skis
- whale watching
- wildlife observation
- yacht racing
- zip line adventure

STEP #2: PLAN A BUDGET

- It is important to determine exactly how much you are able to see and do. Some of you might want to do as much as possible and worry about paying for it later while others might want to spend only what you feel you can afford.
- Use the below worksheet to list all of the expenses that you have already spent on your upcoming vacation. These include your cruise fare, airline tickets, pre- and/or post-cruise hotels, travel insurance, etc.
- Next, make a list of other expenses that you can reasonably expect to face. These would include transportation to/from the ship, alcohol charges on board, gratuities (most ships automatically charge \$10 per person per day), internet usage, etc. For now, do not include purchases you plan to make while shopping either on board the ship or while in port.
- Review these two lists and determine how much flexibility you have in the amount of money you are still able to spend during your time in the ports of call. Arrive at an actual figure (i.e. \$1000) that you can now use as a limit to how much you want to spend on your tours AND shopping purchases. We suggest aiming for a figure that you would consider a 'best-case scenario' (one that is slightly less than what you can actually afford). Chances are you will find some goodies to buy somewhere or an extra tour that you never thought about beforehand which will put your expenses over your goal. However, by using a lower figure from the start, you will feel comfortable knowing that spending a little more than what you have budgeted will not have such a negative effect.

FIXED COSTS	
Cruise fare	
Upgrade packages	
Airfare to/from ship	
Hotel room	
Travel Insurance	
Other:	
Other:	
TOTAL	

REASONABLE EXPENSES	
Taxi to/from ship	
Gratuities	
Drinks on board	
Internet usage	
Other:	
Other:	
Other:	
TOTAL	

GRAND TOTAL

AMOUNT LEFT TO SPEND

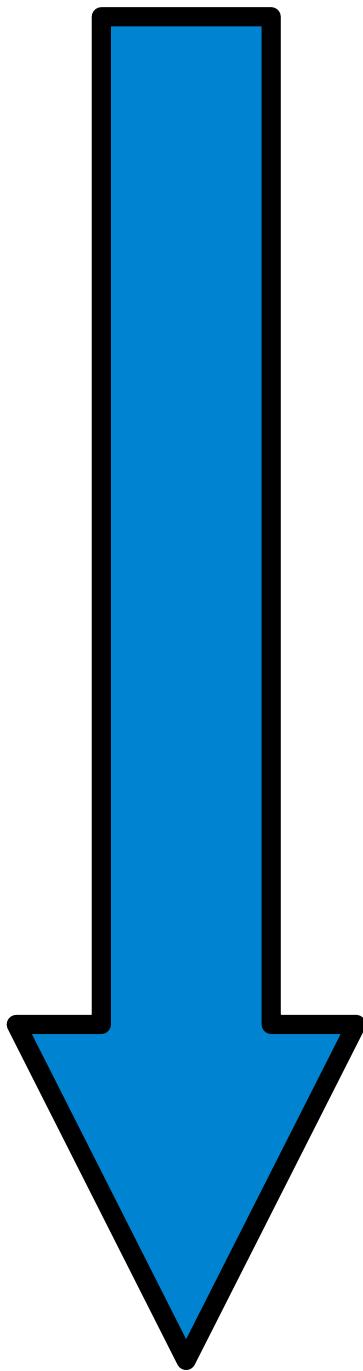
STEP #3: KNOW YOUR ITINERARY

- In order to plan properly, you need to know all of the details regarding your actual itinerary. Take a moment to gather the information you have received from your cruise line or travel agent in regards to the ship's schedule, arrival/departure times in each port, all aboard times (usually 30-60 minutes prior to the departure time), any ports where immigration will take place (this can delay leaving the ship in the morning by up to 60 minutes), etc.
- Find out whether or not your ship will remain on one time zone or if it will switch to the local time zones of each port. Each cruise line has its own policy and sometimes different ships within one particular cruise line follow different rules in regards to time zones. This information is important as it will help you determine exactly how much time you have in port.
- Fill in the below worksheet, listing each of the ports you will visit on your itinerary. When you reach the planning stage and start contacting tour operators, you will now have all the necessary details right in front of you.

LIST EACH PORT	Arrival Time	Departure Time	All Aboard Time	Time Zone Change?
Port 1:				
Port 2:				
Port 3:				
Port 4:				
Port 5:				
Port 6:				
Port 7:				
Port 8:				
Port 9:				
Port 10:				

STEP #4: WHAT & WHERE

- The idea here is to determine which of the activities you circled in Step #1 can be accomplished in each of the ports you will be visiting. In order to assist with this step, we have listed the most popular ports of call in the Caribbean and have included the activities from Step #1 that can be found in each port. This will save you from hours of time-consuming research!



To better view the below chart, use the zoom to take a closer look...

	ANGUILLA	ANTIGUA	BARBUDA	BONAIURE	COSTA RICA	COZUMEL	CURAÇAO	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	GRAND CAYMAN	GREENADA	JAMAICA	PLAYA DEL CARMEN	PUERTO RICO	ROATAN	ST KITTS	ST LUCIA	ST MARTIN	ST THOMAS	ST VINCENT	TRINIDAD / TOBAGO	TURKS / CAICOS
AQUARIUM	X							X											X		
ATV TOUR		X		X		X	X	X					X			X					
BEACH	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
BICYCLING TOUR	X			X			X	X	X							X					X
CATAMARAN CRUISE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
CAVES			X	X	X			X				X	X							X	X
COOKING CLASS							X	X				X									
GLASSBOTTOM BOAT	X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X
GOLF	X	X	X	X	X							X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
HELICOPTER TOUR							X												X	X	
HIKING	X	X						X	X	X			X			X		X	X	X	
HISTORY/MUSEUMS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
HORSEBACK RIDING	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					X
JEEP SAFARI	X	X		X		X	X	X			X	X	X			X	X		X	X	X
KAYAKING	X				X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X			X		X
NATURAL WONDERS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
PARTY CRUISE				X	X					X	X	X				X	X	X	X		
RAINFOREST									X	X	X		X		X	X			X		X
RIVER TUBING									X	X	X	X									
RUM TASTING					X			X		X	X	X				X		X			X
SCUBA DIVING	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
SHOPPING	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
SIGHTSEEING	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
SNORKELING	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
SPORT FISHING	X		X	X		X	X	X			X			X	X	X	X	X		X	X
SWIM WITH DOLPHINS	X					X	X	X			X	X									X
SWIM WITH STINGRAYS	X						X	X	X												
SWIM WITH TURTLES					X			X												X	
SUBMARINE		X	X		X		X		X										X		
TROPICAL GARDENS				X					X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
WATERFALLS								X	X	X						X	X	X		X	X
WATERSPORTS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
WHALE WATCHING									X	X							X		X		X
WILDLIFE VIEWING		X	X	X			X								X	X					X
YACHT RACING					X													X	X		
ZIP LINE TOUR		X		X		X		X	X						X	X					

STEP #5: MATCHING GAME

- It is now time to match your interests from Step #1 with the available activities in each port listed in Step #4. At this point, do not worry if you find that one particular port offers 5 of your interests and another port does not offer any. We will work on that in Step #7.
- Use the list in Step #4 and start by circling all of the ports that are included on your ship's itinerary.
- Then highlight each of the activities that you circled previously that are listed under each of your ports. For example, if you circled St. Kitts in Step #4 and you also circled "rainforest" and "jeep safari" in Step #1, highlight those two activities under St. Kitts. If one activity is listed in more than one port, highlight it everywhere it is listed - the more options you have, the easier it will be to fulfill your goals!
- If you find that one of your interests is not listed next to any of the ports you will be visiting, write that interest on the side for now. At the end, if you are not satisfied with the final plan you create, you can do some additional research with the hopes of finding a way to do that particular activity.

STEP #6: NARROW THE OPTIONS

- You should now have a well-highlighted list of activities under the ports you will be visiting. It should be a list that gets you excited about your cruise! Remember, not everything is possible on every itinerary. Some things just might have to wait until your next vacation.
- So far you are listing ALL of the activities that interest you and that are available in each port. This is of course not a list of everything that you will do; it would be impossible to accommodate everything given the limited amount of time you will have in each port of call.
- However, you should start thinking about how you really want to spend your time. If you enjoy sunbathing, decide how many days you want to go to the beach; if you like to shop, decide how much time you will need for shopping. If you know that you want one port to be a day of rest so that you can further enjoy the ship's amenities, take a look at your list.
- If any of the ports on your list does not have any activities highlighted next to it you might want to consider that port for your day of rest. Or, if any of the ports have only 1 or 2 activities highlighted and both of these activities are also highlighted elsewhere, this may also be the port to take a break. If you want to explore every port, do not make any changes to your list.

STEP #6: NARROW THE OPTIONS - continued

- Now you should narrow your options. If you have any activities that are listed under ONE port only, circle it. This is the easiest way to determine what you should do – if you can only do it in one place, the decision has already been made!
- For your other activities that are listed under more than one port, take a close look and see if anything stands out in particular. For example, you might remember a friend telling you that you must swim with the stingrays in Grand Cayman. If you are able to choose “Swim with the Stingrays” for Grand Cayman and still accomplish the other highlighted options in other ports, again, the decision is made!
- Many of the activities can be done in more than one port if you wish. If you only want a general sightseeing tour of each place, then choose ‘sightseeing’ for each port as the activity of choice. Likewise, if all you want is to snorkel or sail, pick those options for as many ports as you wish. Our guide should be adjusted based upon what type of activities each person prefers to focus more strongly on.
- When you find yourself in a situation where you have several activities that can be done in several ports of call, we suggest that you spend a short amount of time doing some research on the internet. Consider visiting the “Official Tourism Board” website for each port. These websites provide a wealth of valuable information which makes it easy for visitors to discover the major highlights. For example, if you open the website (www.stlucia.org) you will notice a slide show in the header bar of what the Tourism Authority of St. Lucia considers to be their best highlights.

***On the last page of this manual, we have provided a list of the tourism websites for each port of call.**

- After visiting the tourism websites (if needed), take another look at your list. You are now in a more educated position to decide what activities make sense to do in each port. Continue narrowing down your list until you preferably have one activity circled for each port. Note: Shopping and even going to the beach can usually be added on to any day, unless you want to spend an entire day on those activities. So keep in mind that you should be able to manage choosing one activity PLUS either shopping or beach as well.

STEP #7: WHAT DOES EACH ACTIVITY INVOLVE

- Now it is time to figure out exactly how to do the activities that you have highlighted for each port. In order to do so, it is important to determine what each activity involves – for example, a rainforest hike involves transportation, a guide, park entrance fees & local knowledge; parasailing requires getting to a beach; and a sightseeing tour only requires transportation and a guide.
- Again, to make this easier for you, we have created a worksheet that lets you break down each activity and tour option. List your chosen activities in the first column and then mark whether or not each activity requires Transportation (i.e. taxi transfer, driving tour of an island, etc.), a Guide, Specific Local Knowledge, Special Equipment (i.e. scuba diving, snorkeling, kayaking, ATVs, etc.) and Multiple Factors (for example, “Snorkeling & Kayaking” or “Waterfall & Bicycling”). In Step #8 you will learn why this is important to ensuring that you have the best experience possible while saving as much money as you can.

STEP #8: TOUR OPTIONS

- Depending on what is involved in your activities, you will generally have the following options: Booking on board the cruise ship, simply taking a taxi or booking with an independent tour operator.

CRUISE SHIP BOOKED TOURS: While keeping in mind that you will pay a considerably higher price for tours booked through the cruise line than you would with independent tour operators, sometimes these tours are your only option. Certain tour operators will not accept independent bookings, usually because they are contracted with the cruise line and they happen to be the only tour operator in a port that offers a particular activity. Other times, the cruise line might offer exactly what you want and you might therefore be willing to pay the premium for a particular itinerary. In such cases, you should sign up for the ship's tour in order to ensure you get to do the activity offered.

TAXIS: In the worksheet you completed for Step #7, any activity that involves only transportation or any combination of transportation, guide and local knowledge (i.e. going to the beach, visiting a particular village, general sightseeing or historical tour) can easily be accomplished using the services of a licensed taxi driver. These drivers, which you will find at the end of the pier, are officially registered with the local tourism authority and offer unbeatable prices and quality on transfers and general sightseeing. Often times their fares are strictly regulated and posted on the pier. This way, you can be confident that you are paying the official rate. In addition, as most of the ship's sightseeing tours and transfers are actually run by these taxi drivers anyway, you will actually be receiving the exact same experience. But by going directly to the source, you get to save a considerable amount of money.

INDEPENDENT OPERATORS: If an activity involves special equipment and/or multiple factors along with transportation, a guide and local knowledge, you will most likely need to participate in an organized excursion. All that this means is that you should look for an operator that specializes in exactly what you want to do, whether it is scuba diving, snorkeling, a waterfall hike or any other exciting activity. By now, you have learned that there are independent tour operators in each port that are more than ready to accommodate you. Such operators can be found on the pier, through the assistance of local tourism offices or, even better, by planning your tours ahead of time by doing a little research. You will find that independent operators can offer a great variety of options while often giving you a chance to fully customize your tour itinerary. Independent operators are able to accommodate your specific needs and interests as they are not working within the limited boundaries of a ship-organized itinerary.

STEP #9: MAKE A PLAN

- If you have come this far already, you are well aware that booking an independent tour/taxi requires very little effort on your part and provides a lot of attractive benefits. Most importantly, you are able to save money without having to sacrifice quality. For more information on this subject, refer to the enclosed "**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**" report.
- You should always review the cruise line's tour brochure and compare it with the activities that you wish to do in each port. Be sure to compare the prices of what they offer with what you find for similar tours through independent operators. If there are certain aspects of a ship-organized tour that do not appeal to you, it is probably not worth it. Do not choose the "Island Tour & Beach" if all you want to do is spend the day at the beach. You will end up paying more money, wasting time visiting places that do not interest you and spending less time at the beach than you could by using the alternatives.
- As mentioned in the previous section, if you find something listed in the ship's tour brochure that really interests you and you are happy with the cost, then you might want to just book that excursion on board. However, unless a particular activity involves several different complex factors or is exclusive to the ship, you can almost certainly find a suitable alternative independently and end up paying a considerably less amount of money.
- Begin to contact independent tour operators and taxi companies through websites and email. Tell them exactly what you wish to do or ask for suggestions based upon your interests. If a local tour operator in any port has a website, take that as a positive sign. It usually means that they are confident enough that their services are of the highest quality and have taken the necessary steps to try and attract as many people as possible. When you start contacting these operators, you will find that they are usually very excited about your potential business and dedicated to offering you the best experience possible.
- When communicating with local operators, be sure to specify exactly what ship you will be on, the correct date and time of arrival and where to meet your driver/guide. As at an airport, when you come off the ship, you will find independent drivers and guides holding signs with names on it, as many others just like you have booked independently as well. After all, it is one of the fastest growing trends.
- If you are not comfortable booking ahead, remember that there will always be independent tour operators, local guides & tourism welcome centers on or near each of the cruise ship piers. Their specific aim is to provide you exactly the kind of experiences that you wish to participate in. There is usually such a wide variety of services available on the pier that you will rarely be disappointed or have trouble finding exactly what you are looking for.

List of tourism websites for additional research:

Anguilla	www.anguilla-vacation.com
Antigua	www.antigua-barbuda.org
Aruba	www.aruba.com
Bahamas	www.bahamas.com
Barbados	www.visitbarbados.org
Bonaire	www.tourismbonaire.com
Costa Maya, Mexico	www.visitmexico.com
Cozumel, Mexico	www.islacozumel.com.mx
Cristobal, Panama	www.visitpanama.com
Curacao	www.curacao.com
Dominica	www.dominica.dm
Grand Cayman	www.caymanislands.ky
Grenada	www.grenadagrenadines.com
Jamaica	www.visitjamaica.com
Playa del Carmen, Mexico	www.visitmexico.com
Puerto Rico	www.gotopuertorico.com
Roatan, Honduras	www.honduras.com
St. Croix	www.usvitourism.vi
St. Kitts & Nevis	www.stkittstourism.kn
St. Lucia	www.stlucia.org
St. Maarten	www.st-maarten.com
St. Thomas	www.usvitourism.vi
St. Vincent & Grenadines	www.svgtourism.com
Tortola	www.bvitourism.com
Trinidad & Tobago	www.gotrinidadandtobago.com
Turks & Caicos	www.turksandcaicostourism.com

How To Out-Smart Any Casino At Sea

Cruise ship casinos are getting bigger and fancier with every new ship that is being built. Some of them don't look much different than a Vegas casino these days, as the constant sirens, bells and flashing lights entice thousands of passengers to gamble away some of their money.

When you go to Las Vegas, casinos try to attract you with favorable odds and a host of freebies in order to draw you away from the dozens of other casinos competing for your dollars. However, on a cruise ship, there is no competition, and therefore, you will seldom find any freebies and you will certainly not find any favorable odds. In fact, cruise ship casinos are an entirely different world altogether, and if you don't know what you're up against, you are sure to be at a huge disadvantage (which means losing your money!).

Rule #1: Before you enter any casino on board a cruise ship, you should make sure that you have a little knowledge about the games you are about to play.

Think about this, cruise lines sail through international waters and as a result, do not have to follow the rules and regulations of any gaming authority. They are able to create their own rules, their own odds and their own winning percentages in order to ensure that they always maintain as much of an edge as possible.

Cruise line casinos certainly do not make it 'impossible' for passengers to win, or else people would stop going, but they do make it more difficult than normal.

There is also one other important fact that cruise line gambling operations rely upon to ensure they almost always come out on top: *Most ship passengers simply have no idea what they are doing when it comes to gambling.*

This fact alone allows the casinos to rake in the money without too much effort.

So, what should you do?

Rule #2: Learn, learn, learn! Any passenger who learns even the basics of, say, blackjack or poker, will enjoy a great advantage. They will be able to outsmart the inexperienced passengers at the same table and will also significantly reduce the advantage that the 'house' currently enjoys.

The point is this: it definitely pays to know how to play before taking a seat at any table. If you don't know what you are doing, you might as well just toss your money overboard (but don't do this because it is illegal!).

The Hidden Benefits Of A Cruise Ship Casino

This section is going to reveal three easy ways that you can really benefit from a cruise ship casino, and they have absolutely nothing to do with gambling!

1. Free ATM Machine

On the majority of cruise lines, passengers are able to use their on board charge card to purchase chips to use in the casino. These chips can then be exchanged for cash at any time. If you need some cash to spend while you are in port, you could always buy the amount you need in casino chips and then change them over to cash in the casino. As a result, you will avoid any of the high fees that you would have to pay at the ship's ATM or at an ATM on land in a foreign country. (Just remember that the casinos are only open when the ship is in international waters, so plan ahead and get your cash the day before you arrive into port.)

2. Free Loan

Now take a moment to think about the above scenario, but on a larger scale. What if you took out \$1500 (which is usually the maximum that cruise lines allow per day) worth of chips a few days in a row? As you do not pay any fees for these transactions on most cruise lines, you could use this cash as a 'free mini-loan' with 0% interest. You can then spend the money either during your vacation or even when you get home and you will not have to pay anything back until you receive your next credit card bill (with your cruise charges included). The amount you must pay will never increase and you'll avoid the very high cash advance interest rates that most credit card companies charge.

3. Free Points & Miles

Even if you don't need a mini-loan, there is still great benefit to doing the above in large amounts. If you have a credit card that earns 'points' or 'frequent flyer miles', this method allows you to rack up those points quite quickly. You can take out a large sum of money on board in the form of casino chips and then exchange it for cash as mentioned above. Once you get home, you then put the money into your bank account until your credit card bill arrives. Pay off your credit card bill using the same money you had borrowed and you will now have earned several thousand extra frequent flyer miles without spending a penny. You can earn a completely free round trip ticket by doing this once!

Please note: Although these are 3 great ways to get some extra benefits from a ship's casino, check with the cruise line before attempting and make sure that there are no fees for any of the mentioned transactions. Rules can change quite often and cruise lines which currently do not charge any fees may do so in the future. Other than that, enjoy the benefits!

Lower Your Cruise Fare... Even If You've Already Paid

People often spend hours or even days and weeks searching for the lowest possible cruise fare for a particular ship, cabin and itinerary. And usually, such intense research will produce a fare that is considerably lower than the published fares the cruise lines advertise.

However, here is one method that few people even know about but which is bound to ensure you get the absolute lowest fare possible.

Don't stop shopping for cruise fares!

Even if you pay the full amount of your cruise fare weeks or months in advance of your vacation, you should never stop checking for lower fares.

From the time you make your booking until the date that the ship actually sets sail, cruise lines will continue fluctuating the prices of cabins (just as airlines and hotels do) in order to fill every single berth on a particular voyage while making as much money as possible in the process.

Sometimes the fares will increase...and sometimes they will decrease... sometimes by a little and other times by a lot of money. (The next section will explain exactly when cruise fares are at their lowest levels.)

Here's what you need to do.

After making your booking, be sure to understand exactly what class of cabin you have reserved. It often helps to not only have the letter/number of the class but a detailed description of what that classification actually entails.

With this information in hand, spend some time each week continuing to shop around for prices on the cruise that you have already booked. Make sure you look for nothing else except for the class of cabin that you have. Check the websites of online travel agents, cruise booking agencies, the major travel websites and even the cruise line's site as well. Look around for special deals, discounted rates and any other attractive promotions that offer either a better fare or more 'bonuses' than what you received.

The idea is simple of course. You are looking for a cruise fare that is lower than what you have already paid.

If you do find a lower fare for your class of cabin on the exact same voyage you have booked on, print out/save a copy of the offer and write down exactly where and when you found it.

All you need to do now is to phone the cruise lines or your travel agent.

If you have genuinely found a lower fare, it is clearly in the cruise lines interest to lower the fare you have already paid to match that amount. If they don't do this, they run the risk of losing your business and having to resell your cabin at the lower fare anyway. So they might as well give you the best deal possible and keep you as a satisfied customer.

Some cruise lines will make the reduction in your cruise fare without any issue upon verifying that the lower fare you are claiming does actually exist.

Other cruise lines will try to convince you that lowering your fare is not possible. However, in that case, just explain that you would like to cancel your booking and re-book your cruise at the lower fare. This requires a lot more paperwork and time for the representative on the other end of the phone than if they were to simply lower your cruise fare in their computer system.

Like most situations, a little persistence goes a long way. The cruise lines will try their best to get as much money out of you as possible, but they usually won't go as far as making a decision that will result in losing your business altogether.

They might try hard to make you give in and abandon your attempts. But if you don't fall into this trap and hold your ground, you are in an excellent position to have your cruise fare lowered by several hundred dollars.

For those who use a travel agent, you can ask your agent for regular updates on how much your class of cabin is being offered for. The agent can also make the changes to your fare for you if they discover that your fare has been lowered by the cruise lines.

Most people have no idea that this is even an option and automatically assume that once you have paid your fare there is nothing else you can do except to hope that you got a great deal. There are always passengers on board a ship who discover that the 'great deal' they received is actually much higher than almost everybody else who booked a comparable cabin.

As you now know, the main way to avoid having this happen to you is to keep on shopping, even after you've paid. All it takes is for a handful of cabins to remain un-booked for a few weeks and the cruise line will drastically lower the fares. And now you will be waiting right there to benefit from the situation!

The next section is now going to show you exactly when you should be looking for the best deals. Whether you have already made your booking and want to lower your fare or still haven't found the perfect deal, you are about to discover why the most common theory of 'when to book a cruise' is completely incorrect...

'When to Find the Lowest Fares'

The question of when to book your cruise in order to secure the best price is one that most people think has a very simple answer. Whether you speak with a travel agent or even experienced cruise passengers, you are bound to hear the exact same thing repeated over and over again.

The common belief is that booking your cruise well in advance (6+ months ahead) or at the last-minute will give you the best deal possible. The reasoning is that the cruise lines will offer lower fares at the start to get the majority of cabins filled and then lower fares at the very end in order to fill any cabins that have not been sold.

But is this really how it works? Should you plan your vacation one year in advance or wait until two weeks before the cruise is scheduled to begin?

We have been able to gain access to a thorough cruise industry inside report that has actually tracked cruise fares over several years. The study examined over 5,000 voyages in order to determine exactly when the lowest fares can be obtained. The report looked at cruise fares offered by the major cruise lines (Carnival, Celebrity, Holland America, NCL, Princess and Royal Caribbean) starting one year before the actual voyages were to take place.

The results were not what you might expect.

For those people interested in booking an Inside, Outside or Balcony cabin, the lowest cruise fares were consistently offered during the period of time 90 – 45 days prior to the actual sailing date. During this month and a half, average fares decreased by up to \$250 across the board, while average fares for balcony cabins decreased even more, sometimes by as much as \$350.

Prior to this time period (from 360 days to 90 days before the sailing date), cruise fares remained remarkably consistent, fluctuating on average, both up and down, by no more than \$50 dollars. Therefore, booking well in advance does not automatically mean that you will get an incredible bargain.

In addition, last-minute cruise fares actually proved to be the highest fares offered during the entire year. If you book a cruise within 45 days of the sailing date, average fares can be up to \$300 more than at any other time during the previous 360 days. Almost every major cruise line steadily increases their prices during the final 45 days prior to a voyage.

It is important to note that these last-minute cruise fares can still 'appear' to be a 'great deal' because chances are, as soon as you make your last-minute booking, the fares are going to increase even more. You might end up saving several hundred dollars booking a cruise 30 days in advance as opposed to 15 days in advance (which will seem like a great bargain). But generally, you will still be paying more than anyone else who has booked the same class of cabin during the previous year.

So when is the best time to book your cruise?

First of all, it is NOT during that 90-45 day period when the fares are at their lowest.

How can that be?

It turns out that the best time to book your cruise is between 120-90 days prior to the voyage date.

If you wait until the 90-45 day period instead, you will be competing with thousands of other potential passengers who are all very interested in taking advantage of the sudden drop in cruise fares. As a result, these deals will be snatched up quickly and can potentially leave you with a very small choice of cabins to choose from. You may not even be able to find any cabin in the class you prefer or can afford, leaving you with little choice but to settle for a more expensive cabin.

How do you avoid such a scenario? Book your cruise before the rush!

By booking your cruise during the 120-90 day period, you will have a great selection of cabins to choose from and even better, will still have a chance to get the lowest fare possible. As others are waiting for a major price drop, you will already have secured your spot without having to make any sacrifices.

And as you've read in the previous section, even after you book your cruise, you can still have your fare lowered if you find it being offered at a lower price than what you paid.

This method works for every cruise line that offers a 'price protection guarantee' as part of your cruise booking and even for those cruise lines that don't offer it so openly. However, cruise lines are even more likely to honor the lower fare that you have found if you made your booking only a couple of weeks before the price was dropped.

The longer the time lapse between when you make your actual booking and the price drop, the harder it becomes to get your fare lowered. The main reason is that the earlier you book, the more determined you appear to take that particular cruise. Chances are you won't really consider canceling your cruise booking or changing it for another voyage.

On the other hand, if you just made your booking a week or two before the price drop, the cruise line is not as confident and will be far more inclined to reduce your fare to match the new offer.

In the end, continuing to shop around even after you make your cruise booking gives you an opportunity to potentially save several hundred dollars. This is not something to be taken lightly, especially considering how easy it is to make it happen.

Staying Healthy Made Easy

The last thing you want is to return home after your cruise feeling just as stressed, exhausted and frustrated as before you left. In order to prevent this from happening, there are certain practices you can put into place that help maintain a necessary level of health and well-being during your cruise.

This manual offers 10 suggestions that are easy to implement, require minimal effort and take up very little time, but offer direct and immediate benefits.

1. Gym with a View

Exercising on board a cruise ship is an entirely different experience than on land. Even those of you who might cringe at the thought of going to a gym might find yourselves more than willing to use the ship's facilities.

- Many cruise ship gyms offer very motivating environments, often with 180 degree panoramic views across the ocean.
- Exercising during off-peak hours (early mornings, early evenings & late nights) will usually result in having the entire gym to yourself.
- Although personal trainers offer private sessions for a significant charge, you can always ask them for workout tips and recommendations when you see them around the gym. When they are not busy, they will be more than willing to speak with you, allowing you to tap into their expertise at no cost whatsoever.
- Try to spend 30 minutes every day in the gym, either walking/running on the treadmill or riding one of the stationary bikes. You will feel more energized and be able to do a lot more during your vacation without becoming too tired!

2. Outdoor Exercise – Even Better!

If visiting the gym is simply not going to happen, consider the best alternative – walking or jogging around the open deck of the ship. Every ship has one 'track' that goes around the entire ship on one of the open decks.

- You don't even have to change into gym clothes as you take a leisurely stroll.
- Such exercise can be done as a couple or in groups, allowing you to engage in conversation while walking.
- Enjoy fresh air and a therapeutic ocean breeze, especially during sunrise and sunset when there are fewer crowds on the track and incredible views.
- Try to do at least 3-5 laps every single day for best results (I used the outdoor track almost every day of my career, walking 5 laps during sunset. As I marveled at the surreal colors of the sky, my body exercised without me even knowing it!)

3. A Walk into Town

In order to make life as easy as possible, there will always be shuttle buses or taxis available on the pier to whisk you into the main area of town. Don't use them!

- Avoid taking vehicles into town whenever possible.
- Usually, you will find you can get to the same area in less than 15 minutes by walking. Sometimes, as is the case in heavy traffic ports such as St. Thomas, it can even be quicker to walk than to take the shuttle or taxi.
- Not only will you partake in some good, simple exercise and save the cost of the ride, but you will also enjoy a much closer interaction with each destination.
- Many other destinations, such as beaches and shopping centers, can also be easily reached on foot.

4. Take the Stairs

Given that most ships have anywhere between 10 – 20 decks these days, it is understandable that using the elevators seems completely necessary. But would it really be so much trouble to use the stairs?

- Walking up and down the stairs provides one of the easiest methods of continuous exercise.
- It is an excellent way to inject several short, yet very effective, workouts into your daily vacation routine.
- Of course you don't need to take the stairs every time you need to go somewhere, but if you make sure you use them several times a day, you will certainly benefit.
- Be sure to take your time on the stairs and don't rush. Trying to climb faster or step down two stairs at once will not increase the benefits and can actually put unnatural pressure on your knees.

5. Seasickness Solution

What is the best remedy? Should you just bury your face in a pillow and try to wait it out? Some of the most effective alternatives are actually the simplest.

- If the seas become rough and you start to feel a little ill, don't automatically run down to the medical center to get an injection.
- Head onto an open deck area that is near the middle of the ship and stare off into the distance. Use the horizon as your point of focus. Be sure to concentrate on anything other than the moving ship.
- Take continuous deep breaths and drink plenty of water. Eat a small amount of food if you can, but stay away from fatty snacks.

- Try lying down in a deck chair in the fresh air as this helps many people to relax. Close your eyes and you may find that you are able to sleep off the seasickness.
- For those people who are prone to seasickness, consider purchasing an acupressure wrist band or herbal remedy such as ginger tablets before boarding your ship.

6. Preventing Illness

People have been led to believe that cruise ships are prone to major outbreaks of a whole variety of illnesses. In actuality, any of the illnesses that occur on board are actually many more times likely to occur on land. However, with that said, it is always a good idea to take some precautions when entering a new environment.

- Washing your hands frequently is the absolute best way to prevent yourself from getting sick during your cruise. You should wash your hands before and after eating, after using the restroom, before and after going ashore and any other time you happen to be near a sink.
- Such illnesses as the Norwalk Virus and Common Cold are spread through person to person contact, something that is obviously quite common in an enclosed environment such as a ship. Everything inside of a ship is constantly being touched by passengers and crew members, making it easy for germs to spread.
- Cruise lines do their part by ensuring that crew members follow very strict cleaning and sanitation procedures.
- Use hand sanitizer whenever possible, although it should always be used as an additional layer of protection after washing your hands.
- Avoid touching your face with your hands. This will protect against germs you might have picked up by touching something (chairs, railings, shop products, pens, elevator buttons, etc.) that hundreds of other people have touched as well.

7. Natural Light & the Freshest of Air

It's actually not that difficult for passengers to avoid venturing outside for long periods of time during a cruise. A combination of indoor activities plus a little bad weather or even late nights partying can cause anyone to miss out on two of the most needed and healthiest aspects of a cruise.

- Inside the ship, your body is forced to adjust to artificial light. If all of the lights were turned out, you would find almost complete darkness in many areas, no matter what time of day. Crew members refer to this as 'Permanent Midnight' and anyone with an inside cabin will know exactly what I am talking about.
- Similarly, the air inside of a ship is constantly air-conditioned, with outside air being processed and circulated through miles and miles of air ducts within the ship. The air travels a long way before it comes out of the vents, picking up dust and germs during its journey. By the time it reaches you, the air is no longer of the pure, clean quality that you can find simply by stepping outside.

- During days at sea, make sure you spend at least 2 hours outside in order to ensure you receive a healthy amount of fresh air and natural light. Sitting by the pool, walking along the decks, or even relaxing on your balcony are all extremely beneficial ways to pass some time.
- Keep in mind that the air you breathe while at sea is some of the cleanest and healthiest air on the planet. If you truly want to re-energize yourself while on vacation, you should breath as much of this therapeutic air as possible.

8. Think Before You Eat

Eating is a major part of taking a cruise, but that doesn't mean you can't eat healthy.

- Consider ordering some of the vegetarian items on the menu every now and then. If you have been impressed with the meat dishes, chances are that the talented chef will not disappoint with the lighter options either.
- If you suddenly find yourself unable to eat another rich, highly-caloric meal, try ordering from the non-advertised alternative menu. Every ship offers a selection of simple dishes (i.e. grilled chicken breast, salads, steamed vegetables, etc.) that that can be ordered at any time, even though they are not listed on the main menu.
- Before you line up at the 'Midnight Pasta Extravaganza' or '2am Cake Feast', take a moment to consider whether or not you really need that extra food.
- I'm not suggesting that you miss the unique 'Chocoholic Buffet', but usually the food served at these odd times is the exact same food served throughout the day. In the end, people are eating simply for the sake of eating. Avoid this path and you are bound to feel much better the next day and beyond.

9. Water Instead of Soda

As is the case on land, the more water you drink, the healthier your system will be. In addition, the amount of sugar in soda does little to help your body relax and rejuvenate, which is the main goal of taking a vacation!

- The coloring used in soft drinks has been proven to reduce energy and stamina levels, causing people to become exhausted much more quickly than normal.
- As you will already be eating a lot of heavy food, and probably not doing as much exercise as you should, drinking soda will make it even more difficult for your body to relax. Avoiding soda will help you avoid feeling sluggish and unmotivated.
- Water is the best method to flush out your system and provide a continuously natural cleanse. By drinking up to 3 liters per day, you will ensure that your body doesn't get dehydrated due to the dry air (as well as heavy drinking!).

10. The Spa & Sauna

By following the guidelines in the other sections of this package, you will learn how to pay much less for spa services that are offered on board. As a result, using these facilities might turn out to be the best value of your entire cruise.

- Going to the sauna every 2nd or 3rd day is another way to help drastically increase the rejuvenation of your mind and body (I went to the sauna every other day throughout my 10 year career. I even held nightly team meetings in the Swedish sauna during one contract so that everyone on my team could benefit!)
- The best time to go is in the evening, starting 2 hours prior to the first dinner seating. At this time, the majority of passengers begin preparing for dinner, leaving the spa virtually empty. Sneak away for 30 minutes and you will enjoy a private spa experience!
- Book a massage during off-peak times. Not only will you save money, but you will have more options to choose from as the spa will not be crowded. No matter what type of massage strikes your fancy – Japanese, Swedish, Thai, hot-stone – you will definitely benefit from such ultimate relaxation.

The Definition of 'Vacation'

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, a vacation is “a period of time away from work, devoted to pleasure, rest or relaxation”. Before you leave home for your cruise, you must take a moment to understand that definition. The idea is to continually remind yourself that you are supposed to be taking a break from your normal, hectic and fast-paced daily routine. And if you don’t remember to relax and enjoy yourself during your cruise, you are at a risk of returning home without feeling any better than before you left.

In reality, when you leave for your vacation, the ideas of exercise and constantly examining everything you do are going to be the farthest from your mind. However, I am sure you would agree that if you’re able to implement even a fraction of the above suggestions, you will be rewarded with excellent benefits for your health.

The Master Cruise Vacation Packing List

The below packing list is an extensive one, so naturally, you probably won't end up bringing every single item that's listed. You would need two overstuffed large suitcases per person to accomplish that! But you will find just about everything you could possibly need or that would prove useful during a cruise. Then, you can choose which items you want to take on your vacation and start checking them off the list.

Although, it pays to keep in mind the following...

- All ships offer expensive laundry services but many also have self-service laundry rooms where you can use the washing machines/dryers on your own. Just bring a small packet of detergent (in case the ship runs out) and you'll save a ton of money! You can also pack less clothes as a result.
- Learn about the dress code before you go as things are always changing. "Formal Nights" tend to be much less formal now and on some ships, a suit/evening gown are no longer needed.
- Don't assume warm weather regions will always be warm. Weather can change often and it can be cold and windy at night when outside on the open decks, no matter where in the world you happen to be cruising. It can also be quite cold on board the ship due to the air-conditioning.

Before Leaving Home

- Share your itinerary, travel details and contact information with family & friends
- Explain to your neighbors how to get in touch in case of an emergency
- Ask your neighbor to pick up your mail/newspaper while you're gone
- Organize care services for your pets
- Empty the garbage, run the dishwasher and remove perishable food from the refrigerator
- Contact your bank and credit card company and inform them of your travel plans
- Secure your home by locking windows and doors
- Leave some lights on to make it appear as if someone is always home
- Unplug appliances such as tvs, computers, printers, etc.
- Organize payment of any bills that might be due during your time away
- Check-in online for any flights (usually can be done within 24 hours of departure time)
- Book or arrange transportation to the airport, train station, cruise port, etc.
- Place clearly labeled luggage tags on every suitcase and carry-on bag
- Set up automated responses for emails and change your voice-mail message if necessary
- Adjust the heating or air-conditioning settings in order to minimize costs

Essential Documents & Information

- Cruise tickets
- Flight tickets (or train tickets)
- Hotel confirmation
- Car rental documentation
- Driver's license
- Passport & any necessary visas
- Health insurance card
- Travel insurance information
- Luggage tags issued by the cruise line
- Address book (physical version or on your phone)
- Copies of your eyeglasses/contact lens prescriptions
- Medication information (name of medications, dosage & doctor contact details)
- List of phone numbers for your bank, credit card company, doctor, cruise line, airline, etc.
- Photocopies of all the above
- Clear #10 envelope-sized document holder to keep everything above secure

Money Matters

- Wallet with cash (USD or Euros are the most widely accepted currencies)
- Extra stash of small notes for tips (hotel staff, drivers, tour guides, etc.)
- Credit & Debit cards
- List of PIN numbers if you haven't memorized them

Gadgets

- Cell phone with charger
- Camera with extra memory cards, battery, charger and necessary cables
- iPod/mp3 player with charger and headphones (only needed if your phone cannot play music)
- Laptop with power cable
- USB flash drive with photocopies of documents & other important information saved on it
- Underwater disposable camera (if you plan to go snorkeling or scuba diving)
- eReader and charger (Kindle, Nook, etc.)

General Clothing

- Underwear & socks (both casual and formal)
- Sweatshirt/sweater and/or jacket
- Shorts
- T-shirts/short-sleeve casual shirts
- Exercise attire
- Jeans & trousers
- Belts
- Sleepwear
- Swimwear
- Formal shoes
- Comfortable daytime shoes (sneakers, walking shoes, etc.)
- Sandals and/or flip-flops
- Hats & sunglasses
- Cold weather clothing if needed
- Jewelry

For The Men

- Semi-formal shirts & pants
- Ties
- Sport-jacket
- Full suit and/or tuxedo
- Undershirts

For The Women

- Informal skirts/dresses
- Semi-formal pants & tops
- Formal evening wear (gowns and/or dresses)
- Stockings and slips
- Purses (daytime and evening)
- Nightgown

Personal Care

- Toothbrush & toothpaste
- Deodorant
- Hair products (comb, brush, gel, spray, hair ties, hair clips, etc.)
- Shampoo & conditioner
- Moisturizers and body lotion
- Sunscreen
- Cotton buds
- Cologne & perfumes
- Dental floss & mouthwash
- Shaving razors & extra blades
- Shaving cream
- Contact lenses & solution
- Eyeglasses & cases
- Make-up & remover
- Nail clippers & tweezers
- Small scissors
- Hand sanitizer

Medicine Cabinet

- Prescription medication
- Vitamins
- Over the counter allergy medicine
- Headache medication
- Cold medicine
- Insect repellent
- Seasickness remedies (Dramamine, ginger capsules, etc.)
- Band-aids
- Imodium
- Cough drops
- After-sun lotion

For Your Cabin

- Power strip
- Extension cord
- Alarm clock
- Nightlight
- Compact flashlight
- Air freshener
- Reading light
- Doorstop or cord to keep balcony door open

Miscellaneous

- Day-pack
- Post-It notes (leave messages for your cabin steward or traveling companion)
- Waterproof pouch that holds passport, camera and wallet
- Large insulated mug (fill it up with coffee, soda, water or juice while on board)
- Notebook for keeping track of your experiences
- Reading material
- Poncho or light rain jacket
- Compact umbrella
- Business cards
- Laundry bag
- Extra batteries
- Wristwatch
- Sewing kit
- Small packets of tissues
- Portable clothesline
- Highlighters (to highlight the activities in the daily newsletter that interest you)
- Clothes pins to clip onto the bottom of the shower curtain (prevents curtain from sticking to you)
- Over-the-door shoe holder (place small items inside in order to avoid losing them in the cabin)
- Stain remover (Tide stick)
- Ear plugs
- Travel steamer/iron

The Best Of The Web – The Sites You Don't Want To Miss

The below websites all come from a travel industry database that lists the top websites for each travel category based upon extensive testing and research. These are the sites that travel professionals and cruise specialists use in order to find the best possible deals and gain the most up-to-date information.

The below links will take you straight to each individual website where you can learn even more about what is on offer. These sites are extremely useful for any traveler, regardless of whether or not you are looking for a cruise vacation. No matter what type of travel plans are in your future, this is your chance to have access to the exact same deals and information that travel professionals and experts rely upon.

CRUISE DEALS:

Moment's Notice – www.Moments-Notice.com – For last minute deals, this website is the place to go. Constantly praised by cruise veterans for their bargains and customer service, you can save a ton of money if you don't mind planning your trips at the last minute.

Cruise Direct - www.CruiseDirect.com - An online cruise wholesaler offering some of the lowest fares you'll find anywhere for almost every major cruise line.

Cruise Compete - www.CruiseCompete.com - Fill in the details of what dates, ships and itineraries you are looking for and you'll receive offers from over 300 independent travel agents who will compete to give you the lowest fare possible.

Cruises Only - www.CruisesOnly.com - This award winning website is listed as America's largest cruise agency, with hundreds of ship reviews and excellent offers on cruises all over the world.

Kayak Cruises - www.Kayak.com/cruises - This comprehensive, flexible search engine checks hundreds of well-known travel websites and lists all of the details on one easy to read screen.

Sky Auction – www.SkyAuction.com – This site allows you to actually bid on cruises being offered by various travel agencies and cruise lines. Winning bids are often as low as \$1 on this site (you do have to pay additional taxes but the overall price can still be up to 80% less than the published price).

If you really have a flexible schedule, you may want to look at last minute discount specialists such as icruise.com, cruisestar.com and lastminutetravel.com as well!

Another website to try is Cayole.com which aims to actually predict whether a particular cruise fare will become cheaper or more expensive in the near future. They use a massive database of cruise fares in order to make their predictions.

AIRFARE:

Kayak - www.Kayak.com- This website is commonly known for consistently offering the lowest fares on both domestic and international routes. Be sure to check out their 'Insight' section as well.

Airfare Watchdog - www.AirfareWatchdog.com- Whenever an airline suddenly reduces their fares by drastic amounts, this website is usually the first to know about it. They gather the latest fare information from almost every airline, including the smaller ones that are not usually included on major sites offering airfare.

Forecast - www.Forecast.com- This website offers a great tool that actually predicts whether or not the airfare for a particular flight will increase or decrease. It will actually tell you whether or not your best bet is to purchase the ticket now or wait until a better fare becomes available.

Seat Guru - www.SeatGuru.com- Once you have booked your flight, be sure to check out this website before reserving any specific seats on the plane. You can find out the pros and cons of every single seat on every airplane of all the major world airlines. It's an incredibly useful resource!

RENTAL CARS:

Hotwire - www.Hotwire.com- In order to offer such low prices, the catch is that you will not know which rental car company you will be renting from before you make your reservation. However, in the end, a mid-size sedan is the same no matter where you book it from, so there really is no reason not to take advantage of their excellent deals.

HOTELS:

Trip Advisor - www.TripAdvisor.com- Before making a hotel booking, have a look at this most extensive and detailed list of hotel reviews that are written by both actual guests and professional reviewers.

Late Rooms - www.LateRooms.com- This is the place to go for last-minute deals on rooms in hotels outside of the USA. When you find the perfect deal, you will be given the phone number to the hotel and a reference number to verify the discounted rate.

Priceline - www.Priceline.com- If you are searching for mid-range to luxury hotel accommodation, Priceline consistently offers the best deals on the internet. Every city is broken down into several areas and you then narrow your search based upon where you want to be. The only downside is that you will not know the exact name of the hotel until after you confirm your reservation, but you will see its Star Rating and past guest feedback beforehand.

The Honest Scoop On Cruise Ship Employment

I receive many emails asking me how I ended up working on board cruise ships in the first place. Whether you might be interested or perhaps you know someone who is thinking about working in the cruise industry, here is my personal advice on how to go about getting a job on board a ship.

When I began looking for a position on board a cruise ship some 10 years ago, things were not very well organized. It took months to contact cruise lines, months to wait for responses and then even more time to follow up over and over again. And even when you did get hired, it often took several more months to get all of the paperwork in place and finally get you off to your first ship.

Since those days, two things have happened:

1. Several cruise employment agencies have begun operating which claim to guide you through the entire hiring process. Many of them also send your resume/CV directly to the cruise lines and maintain an updated database of available positions.
2. Several websites have begun offering assistance in connecting potential applicants with available jobs in the cruise industry.

But the question is...**how do you know who to trust?**

For example, if you use an agency, you will pay a fee of anywhere between \$100 - \$1000 for their services. And there is never any guarantee that they will actually get you a position on board a ship.

As a result, here's my first piece of advice: **Do not use a cruise employment agency.**

The absolute best way to get a job on board a cruise ship is to utilize the advice of experienced crew members who know the system inside and out.

So here is what I recommend

If you or someone you know is interested in working on board cruise ships, you need to visit:

HowToWorkOnACruise.com

This website offers a solid description of life on board cruise ships, allowing potential applicants to determine whether or not such employment is suitable for them.

Then, for those who are still interested in working on board cruise ships, the helpful team over at HowToWorkOnACruise.com (which consists of two well-known cruise ship employees who have done wonders in assisting hundreds of people with finding cruise ship employment), offer their very own detailed, step-by-step guide on exactly how to land a job.

There is no other cruise ship employment tool quite like it, which is clearly evident by the number of people who have been hired in the cruise industry as a result of this guide.



**The team at Intelligent Cruiser
wishes you calm seas and enjoyable
adventures on all of your
future cruise vacations...**



Please check your email inbox from time to time for updates and further advice that we'll be sharing with you!