

Cruise ships



COVID-19 information:

There have been a number of outbreaks of COVID-19 on cruise ships. Infections can spread easily on board, and medical care onboard is limited. Amid an outbreak, quarantines and docking are challenging partly due to a large number of people aboard. Those who have not been vaccinated against COVID-19 are most at risk.

Many cruise ship companies require proof of COVID-19 vaccination to board.

See official advice:

- From the Canadian government (<https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories>)
- From the US government (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/before-you-go/travelers-with-special-considerations/cruise-ship-passengers.html>)

(Information last updated 20 Dec 2021)



The upper deck of a typical cruise ship

Cruise ships are large passenger sea vessels popular as a form of tourism. During the last decade, they became a major part of the tourism industry. Tourists usually embark on a round-trip to visit several ports of call, there are also "trips to nowhere" without any stop-overs, where the journey and onboard services are the main attraction. By far, the major destination for cruise tourism is the Caribbean, although the Mediterranean, Baltic, or Alaska regions are also popular. They are increasingly a topic of controversy due to their heavily negative environmental impact, over-tourism, and other ethical issues. On the other hand, they are an important source of income in many regions, and some people love them due to their advantages. They make it easy to visit several places in a single trip with no need to repack belongings and use a car/train/bus/plane to travel to each location.

On a cruise, your "hotel" comes along with you – cabin, meals and transportation, and even entertainment. You unpack once, and may go to bed in Cabo San Lucas and wake up in Puerto Vallarta, and so on to other destinations, to repack only at the cruise end. This can make a great travel experience. Your sense of where you are is compromised only by not taking note of your itinerary and the daily ship's newsletters delivered to your cabin. Such a sampling of various ports, cities, islands, or shores in a region can help you decide if and where you'd want to visit later for a longer time. Typical cruise itineraries limit the time you

spend in each place; usually, it means just a day of activities or sightseeing. They may also include one or more days at sea – paradise if you enjoy a relaxing day by the pool or other shipboard activities, but less so if you prefer more active and open exploration ashore. Nonetheless, the benefits outweigh the drawbacks for enough people to support a growing industry.

Today you can visit every continent on earth, including Antarctica, by cruise ship. Exotic destinations, such as the Galapagos Islands, are best visited by small expedition vessels. While these cruises are expensive, you'll be traveling with expert guides.

This article focuses on ocean cruising and ships. There exist river cruise ships, popular particularly in Europe, working on a similar principle, just using rivers and other internal waterways. Cruise ships represent just one of the multiple options for passenger travel by sea; ferries reach isolated coastal outposts with no road and islands where distance or limited amounts of traffic make highway bridge construction impractical, river boat and barge canal cruising offer more in-depth, close-up looks at many countries in their interiors, while the few remaining ocean liners were designed not as floating hotels for entertainment but as practical transport vessels built for speed. For travel on smaller vessels, see Cruising on small craft.

Understand

The golden age of transoceanic passenger travel has faded greatly. The few surviving ships from the era of the great ocean liners have mostly been converted to cruising, preserved as museums and/or hotels, or are laid-up. That does not mean that travel across the sea by ship is gone too. In truth, modern-day *passenger ships* are sometimes faster than the ocean liners of yore, and in some ways more luxurious – and you do not have to buy first class tickets to enjoy most of it. The Cunard "Queens" *Queen Mary 2*, *Queen Victoria* and *Queen Elizabeth* still make traditional fast Atlantic crossings seasonally and receive use as cruise ships at other times. *Queen Mary 2*, launched in 2004, runs from Southampton to New York City, formerly a well-beaten path for multiple rival trans-Atlantic passenger lines. In those days, passengers were separated physically by the class of passage they had booked (exemplified in the movie "Titanic"). Today nearly all public facilities and areas are shared by all passengers.

The picture of cruise ship travel painted by the TV series *The Love Boat* (aired 1977-87) isn't particularly *misleading* (except about the inevitable bliss before debarkation and the all-American crew), but it is rather *incomplete*. Due to economy of scale, most modern cruise ships carry lots of passengers. While the luxury segment of the cruise industry boasts small ships – even "boutique" vessels or "mega-yachts" – most ships form floating towns. Voyages range from a few days to full circumnavigations of the globe lasting three months or more, while fares range from a few hundred dollars to US\$100,000 or more.

Luxury cruise lines may have ships carrying just 100–800 or so passengers. Larger ships carry 2,000–3,500 passengers, while mega-ships can carry over 5,000. The largest cruise ship in the world, *Wonder of the Seas* can carry nearly 7,000 passengers (5,750 at double occupancy) and has a gross tonnage over five times that of the Titanic! Each size has its merits; for example:

- Smaller ships can visit smaller harbors in highly desirable, rugged shorelines or unusual locales, e.g. the Riviera, Galapagos, Fjords.
- Larger ships may offer a few more amenities as discussed in "On-board" below but must use well-sized harbors (or anchor/moor off-shore), and require transport and touring infrastructures to handle so many people.
- Mega-ships offer huge public spaces and wide-ranging activities, but are limited to major ports with even greater tourist infrastructures.

Cruise lines offer widely varying itineraries. Examples range from:

- **A few days** at sea or to a nearby port-of-call. These may be offered as an introduction to cruising, or just as an opportunity to party.
- **One or two weeks** to visit ports and sights in a particular region, per "Cruise types" below.
- **A month or more** to see a region of the world, or **three or more months** to go around the world; a lifetime experience.

Each cruise is comprised of one or more **cruise segments**, e.g., a 1–2 week "round-tripper" may be one segment, while visiting two or more regions may sometimes involve 2–3 segments of an around-the-world cruise. That way, cruise lines can sell affordable "pieces" of long cruises that otherwise few can consider. Not infrequently, cruisers will buy two or three back-to-back/sequential segments to build a longer cruise, e.g., 7–10 days from Florida to the Western Caribbean, return, then 7–10 days for the Eastern, or two or more world regions when they are far away.

The price of an economy cruise may be compared to staying at a hotel with small rooms but good facilities, meals, etc. Standard cabins may cost \$80–150 per day per person, while the rate for a luxury cruise or expeditionary cruise to polar regions can cost \$1,000 per day — yes, per person. As a rule of thumb, if you focus only on economy you may get a somewhat older, less well decorated and equipped ship; you *may* have to pay for meals (rare); or your cabin may have noise from the ship's engines or other sources. If you pay a bit more for essentially the same cruise but on a higher-quality or newer ship, you *should* get better amenities, comfort, etc.

Choosing a cruise - early questions

Especially for first-time cruisers, this overall article should help you understand what going on a cruise is all about, and what might fit what you'd like. Before that, you might ask yourself key questions:

- Who'll be in your group, e.g., just friends, a couple, a family of parents and children, a multi-generational family (including grand-parents)? And do any members have special needs, e.g., to get around?
- What "caliber" of cruise interests you? — economy, mainstream, premium, luxury, expedition?
- What's your budget? In-pocket now and for cash needed during/after the trip, e.g., payments you'll make at least as a cruise deposit and (probably) to buy trip insurance shortly after you book the trip, as you pay the rest of the cruise cost a few months before departure, as needed when you buy airline tickets to/from the cruise port, and to cover funds for what can be non-trivial costs during the trip?
 - Does your budget fit a typical cruise with lots of benefits included (discussed below)? Or perhaps an "all-inclusive" where (at substantially greater cost) nearly everything is pre-paid by and for everyone, e.g., tours, spa services, unlimited alcoholic drinks?
- How much time do all in your group have to make the trip together and when? And how well does the "when" fit with where you all might want to go, e.g., Alaska in January might have certain complications.
- How much time do you want to spend at each cruise destination? Each cruise tends to vary in the amount of time they spend at their destinations. This is an especially important consideration for Caribbean and Mediterranean cruises which can stop in multiple islands and cities even in the span of a few days. Some cruises will spend a few hours at each destination, whereas some cruises will spend a whole day or more. Look into the trip itinerary and ask yourself if you want to spend most of your time relaxing on the ship, or if you prefer to explore each destination.

With basic answers to those questions and use of this article, (we hope) you'll be able to generate a picture of what kind of cruise fits you best. Many find themselves surprised that the cost for a cruise (using advice on cost-avoidance noted below) may cost about the same as a road trip or fly/stay vacation of comparable length, services and accommodations.

Companies

"Big Three" cruise lines

The "Big Three" of the ocean cruise industry are (from largest to smallest) *Carnival Corporation*, *Royal Caribbean Cruises*, and *Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings*. Together, they carry 80 percent of all cruise passengers.

Carnival Corporation is the largest of the Big Three. It owns nine cruise lines:



Cruise ships in the port of Key West

- [Carnival Cruise Line \(http://www.carnival.com\)](http://www.carnival.com)
- [Princess Cruises \(http://www.princess.com\)](http://www.princess.com)
- [Costa Cruises \(http://www.costacruise.com\)](http://www.costacruise.com)
- [AIDA Cruises \(http://www.aida.de\)](http://www.aida.de)
- [Holland America Line \(http://www.hollandamerica.com/main/Main.action\)](http://www.hollandamerica.com/main/Main.action)
- [P&O Cruises International \(http://www.pocruises.com\)](http://www.pocruises.com)
- [P&O Cruises Australia \(http://www.pocruises.com.au\)](http://www.pocruises.com.au)
- [Cunard Line \(http://www.cunard.com\)](http://www.cunard.com)
- [Seabourn Cruise Line \(http://www.seabourn.com\)](http://www.seabourn.com)

Royal Caribbean Cruises is the second largest of the Big Three. It wholly owns two cruise lines, and owns the majority of a fourth (Silversea).

- [Royal Caribbean International \(http://www.royalcaribbean.com.au\) =](http://www.royalcaribbean.com.au)
- [Celebrity Cruises \(http://www.celebritycruises.com/home.do\)](http://www.celebritycruises.com/home.do)
- [Silversea Cruises \(http://www.silversea.com\)](http://www.silversea.com)

Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings is the smallest of the Big Three. It owns three cruise lines:

- [Norwegian Cruise Line \(NCL\) \(http://www.ncl.com\)](http://www.ncl.com)
- [Oceania Cruises \(http://www.oceaniacruises.com\)](http://www.oceaniacruises.com)
- [Regent Seven Seas Cruises \(http://www.rssc.com\)](http://www.rssc.com)

Independent cruise lines

- [Compagnie du Ponant \(http://www.ponant.com\)](http://www.ponant.com)
- [Crystal Cruises \(http://www.crystalcruises.com\)](http://www.crystalcruises.com)
- [Disney Cruise Line](#)
- [Fred Olsen Cruise Lines \(http://www.fredolsencruises.com\)](http://www.fredolsencruises.com)
- [Hapag-Lloyd Kreuzfahrten \(http://www.hlkf.de\)](http://www.hlkf.de) (in German)
- [Marella Cruises \(https://www.tui.co.uk/cruise/\)](https://www.tui.co.uk/cruise/) (TUI)

- [MSC Cruises \(http://www.msccruises.com/gl_en/select_your_country.aspx\)](http://www.msccruises.com/gl_en/select_your_country.aspx)
- [Peter Deilmann-Reederei \(http://www.deilmann-kreuzfahrten.de\)](http://www.deilmann-kreuzfahrten.de) (in German)
- [Phoenix Kreuzfahrten \(http://www.phoenixreisen.com\)](http://www.phoenixreisen.com) (in German)
- [Star Cruises \(http://www.starcrises.com\)](http://www.starcrises.com) — based out of [Hong Kong](#), covering mainly the Asia-Pacific region
- [Transocean Kreuzfahrten \(http://www.transocean.de\)](http://www.transocean.de) (in German)
- [TUI Cruises \(http://tuicruises.com\)](http://tuicruises.com) (in German)
- [Viking Ocean Cruises \(https://www.vikingcruises.com/oceans\)](https://www.vikingcruises.com/oceans)

Small ship cruise options

- [Adventure Canada \(http://www.adventurecanada.com\)](http://www.adventurecanada.com) – Canadian Arctic including Northwest Passage crossings, Greenland
- [Nicko Cruises \(https://www.nicko-cruises.de/en/\)](https://www.nicko-cruises.de/en/) – cruises in German rivers including the Rhine, Elbe, Saar, and Oder
- [North Pacific Expeditions \(https://northpacificexpeditions.com\)](https://northpacificexpeditions.com) – adventure cruises to Alaska (via Inside Passage), Prince William Sound and the Kenai Peninsula
- [North Star Cruises \(http://www.northstarcrises.com.au\)](http://www.northstarcrises.com.au) – Australia, New Guinea, Indonesia
- [Orion Expedition \(http://www.orionexpeditions.com\)](http://www.orionexpeditions.com) – adventure cruises, worldwide but specialising in things like Antarctic or Amazon trips
- [Paul Gauguin Cruises \(http://www.pgcrises.com\)](http://www.pgcrises.com)
- [SeaDream Yacht Club \(http://www.seadream.com\)](http://www.seadream.com)
- [Star Clippers \(http://www.starclippers.com\)](http://www.starclippers.com) – sailing vessels
- [Un-Cruise Adventures \(https://uncruise.com/\)](https://uncruise.com/) – small ship adventure cruises focusing on wilderness, wildlife and treading lightly; Western hemisphere
- [Viking River Cruises \(http://www.vikingrivercruises.com\)](http://www.vikingrivercruises.com) – river cruises in Europe, Egypt, and Asia
- [Windstar Cruises \(https://www.windstarcrises.com/\)](https://www.windstarcrises.com/) – luxury sailing vessels
- [SkarvLines Adventure Cruises \(https://www.skarvlines.com\)](https://www.skarvlines.com) - small ship converted fishing trawler cruising Scotland's waters, focussing on wildlife, walking & Scottish heritage.

For less-traditional cruising,

See also: [Baltic sea ferries](#), [Hurtigruten](#)

Cruise types

Your experience will be substantially affected by the cruise type you choose. You'll see discussion of other issues about timing (high-/low-season and "shoulder" seasons), and distances and how to traverse them later.

On a **port-intensive** itinerary, except for a few sea days:

- You might dine one evening, then enjoy entertainment, dancing, etc., go to sleep, and wake-up docked at your next port of call.
- Under a typical full-day port visit, you can often start ashore at 7–8AM and be expected back approximately 30 minutes before ship departure at 5–6PM or so.
 - You can eat breakfast shipboard at your place of choice and be off-ship on your way to an organized tour, self-arranged tour or activities, or just a walk-about.

- An "all-day" tour may include lunch; see the tour description. A half-day morning tour can have you back to the ship for lunch, after which you may choose shopping or a walk-about for the afternoon. Half-day tours that begin shortly after on-board lunch allow you to walk about on-shore or shop in the morning.
- See discussion of touring in "Ashore" below

If you prefer such a cruise:

- Look for itineraries in regions that offer many nearby ports, such as the Mediterranean, Baltic, The Fjords, the United Kingdom, Caribbean, Alaska, Australia, South Pacific and the Mexican Riviera.
- Look for departure ports within the region, to minimize sea days: for example, Caribbean trips starting in San Juan for the Caribbean, Amsterdam or Copenhagen for the Baltic or Fjords.
- In contrast, ships from Miami, Fort Lauderdale or Tampa can take 1–2 days to reach the Caribbean, and the same to return. But you have more cruise and ship choices there, and you can choose to drive to either port if you live close enough (see "Get in" below).

If you prefer **sea days**, you can look for:

- *Re-positioning cruises* (often crossing oceans) or *crossings* per se. The former takes the ship to a new region for many segments that take advantage of an approaching high season, e.g., from Alaska to "winter" in the Caribbean. The latter involves a segment of a major cruise to another region. Both usually take two weeks or more, and often involve one-way international flights to reach departing or ending ports. (See "Flying" under "Get in" below.)
- Visits to distant islands or regions, e.g., a voyage to/around Hawaii from Los Angeles.
- Segments of around-the-world cruises, usually "crossing" major regions over a period of 3–6 weeks. They, too, will usually involve one-way international flights.
- Around-the-world cruises, taking 90 days or more — best considered once you know you're comfortable with *many* days at sea.

When you find a voyage that appeals to you, look at "Do" below and the ship's description (on-line or in brochure) to appreciate on-board activities.

There are also various **cruises for special interests**, e.g., for bridge players (perhaps with a few masters on board), celebrity entertainers, lectures on culture, political science or history, or LGBT lifestyles. There have even been Linux, "geek", big band, rock and roll, and home theater cruises, some of which are annual events. A few cruise sites will help you find them. Their itineraries may focus more on on-board activities than destinations.

Cruise modes/themes

Ocean cruises

- **Classic cruises** still exist, the cruises where you dress up for dinner. The exclusive ships are patronized by an affluent clientele and the ships are more of ocean yachts with larger cabins than modern ocean giants. A special subcategory are the large sail ships.
- **Sightseeing cruises** are designed to include as many sights as possible, itineraries including the Mediterranean and port cities of Northern and Western Europe. A subclass more reminiscent of expeditions are cruises around Cape Horn, to the Antarctica or into the Milford Sound. On such cruises you will generally travel onboard special-built ships.

- **Club cruises** are popular nowadays. These almost always include land excursions, wellness, fitness and sunbathing on board. The atmosphere and dress code on board is casual. These cruises are common all over the world.
- **Fun cruises** are geared towards entertaining the guests and include a professional entertainment program as well as discos and movie theaters. This "Las Vegas-version" of the club cruise is primarily offered by American cruise companies in the Caribbean.
- **Mini-cruises** of one or a few days are usually taken on board large ferries, these are common for example in the Baltic Sea.
- **Theme cruises** – as the name indicates, they are centered around a theme like music, sports, wellness or fine dining. Frequently there are famous people on board such as Olympic medalists, star chefs, singers or orchestras. These cruises can be quite expensive and are usually only worth considering if you are very interested in the theme.
- **Expeditions** mean a limited number of guests, and high prices on board ships small enough to get to places where normal cruise ships wouldn't be able to go. Popular are destinations like the Amazon or the Poles. In particular the icebreakers that are required for getting to the polar parts of the world offer only a few dozen cabins. Such cruises are geared towards people who want to experience and learn more about the destinations and are often headed by academics and other experts who hold lectures on board.
- **Round the world cruises** on luxury cruisers take at least three months and prices start from USD15,000. These are in practice series of shorter cruise segments, each one or two weeks in duration, that can be booked separately.
- **Freighter cruises** sound exotic, but on surprisingly many freighters you may travel as a paying passenger. For long distances, these are often cheaper than regular cruises and they are certainly different from other forms of travel. There are some drawbacks, though: there is generally no entertainment on board and the cabins are rather spartan. The ports and the schedules are planned according to the freight, not to the wishes of the couple of extra passengers.
- **Maiden voyages** – traveling on the very first trip from the shipyard (or from some other departure port) to the customer can be astonishingly cheap if tickets are available. These are the "test drives" of new ships and can be real adventures. Finishing work is often still being done on the interior during the maiden voyage, moreover the crew is often inexperienced or do not know each other well. There are many things that can go wrong on such a trip – the worst case scenario being engine malfunction in the middle of the ocean, and itineraries often change during the voyage.



Cruises to Greenland are usually of the "Expedition" type

River cruises

The character of these cruises depends on the cities and regions next to the river. These are common on major rivers such as the Danube (Europe), Volga (Asia) or Nile (Africa). Many package tours to China include a multi-day cruise along the Yangtze River including passing through the ship locks of the Three Gorges Dam.



River cruise boat on a tributary of the Yangtze

These ships and boats are much smaller than ocean cruisers and the entertainment on board is much more limited.

Cruise seasons

Many cruising regions have "**high**", "**low**" and "**shoulder**" seasons. These usually track with the most and least desirable times to visit the region, and times in-between, e.g., winter for the Fjords and late summer and fall for the Caribbean (tropical storms) are deemed undesirable. Expect to pay premium prices during high-season, substantially less in "low", and perhaps you'll find some bargains in "shoulder", e.g., for "re-positionings".

Under **repositioning cruises**, many ships transfer among distant regions that have opposite high-seasons, e.g., between the Mediterranean, Baltic or Alaska and the Caribbean, South America, Australia, or New Zealand. The long distances require many sea days, often at attractive per day prices for those who like at sea days. On the downside, you may not see much else than the ocean during the cruise.

Here are some of the most popular cruising regions in the world:

- Mediterranean — often divided in a western and eastern section, cruises in the latter section may include ports in the Black Sea or the Red Sea
- Western Europe — some cruises are extended all the way to the Canary Islands and the Azores
- Northern Europe — including the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, if you are looking for a shorter cruise, this may be a good area
- Alaska — normally runs out of Vancouver in the summer months
- Caribbean — possibly the most popular cruise destination, usually out of ports in on the east coast of the United States, some trips continue all the way to the South American coast
- Oceania — commonly in the waters of Australia and New Zealand, but sometimes also including islands in the Southern Pacific, usually from hubs off the east coast of Australia
- Southeast Asia — can generally be divided into the eastern and western sections, with Singapore serving as a hub serving both sections. Hong Kong is also a major hub for the eastern section of Southeast Asia.
- Cold areas of the world, like Greenland, Svalbard and Antarctica are usually visited by special ships that have the ability to travel through ice

Be prepared for bad weather or ice changing the itinerary of the cruise. Usually the cruise company has planned in alternative destinations if it's impossible to follow the original schedule.

Cruise demographics

While the cruise industry once catered primarily to seniors, the age of passengers has diversified significantly. The Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) in 2018 reported the average age of cruise ship passengers is 46.7 years, which is slightly younger than the populations of Japan and Germany (47.3 years and 47.1 years respectively). Many lines appeal to 20-to-40-year-old couples, "party" cruises attract young adults, and Disney and others focus on families with children and teens. Cruising has turned into an enormously popular family vacation due to well-designed children's programs, even special cabin configurations.

Some itineraries and cruise-lines may attract more seniors, e.g., trans-Atlantic and -Pacific re-positioning cruises, Holland–America (it very effectively supports but doesn't just market to seniors). Reasons include cost, cruise length, numbers of days at sea, and dates that conflict with school.

If cruise demographics are important to you, read the cruise description carefully, research web sites on cruising (see "Other resources" below), and work through your travel/cruise agent to learn the probable demographics of any trip you're considering. You'll be glad you did so, or you risk embarking on a ship filled with rowdy young adults or seniors with limited activities.

If handicapped or pregnant

If anyone in your party has a **physical limitation**, the cruise line can usually help – especially if notified in-advance. Without sacrificing personal privacy, use your agent (or directly if no agent is involved) to let them know about your needs and when they apply, e.g.

- If you need access to special cabin facilities, you can be assigned a cabin specially equipped for your general needs, e.g., ADA qualified. These may include door thresholds with little or no rise, convenient handrails to get about the cabin and bathroom, and special bathing equipment.
- Help with the significant walking distances to embark and dis-embark (process discussed below), or to go on port visits. In some ports the ship is anchored offshore and shore excursion participants are transported ashore by small boats which might pose challenges if you've not prearranged crew assistance.
- If you purchase a fly/cruise or cruise-extension package (also discussed below), you should mention any other help you'll need.
- Some companies may also require you to bring an assistant to help you in possible emergency situations.

A cruise can place you some distance from proper **pre-natal care and birthing facilities**, especially advanced medical care, as sickbays are not equipped or staffed to handle labor or premature infants. If you have any complication, or might be well-into your third-trimester during a cruise under consideration, consult your doctor. Then inform the cruise-line, through your agent if used. A note of fitness for travel from him/her can assuage the fears of the line and staff as you go through embarkation processing.

Many cruise lines will in fact not permit you to cruise once you reach a certain point in your pregnancy – often 24 weeks. Failure to check this may mean you'll be denied boarding upon arrival at the pier to embark if you are too far along. Birth at sea also has some interesting but not unsolvable citizenship complications.

Booking a cruise

You can book a cruise through several types of providers, e.g., directly with a cruise line (by phone or on-line), through an on-line travel web site (that may also offer (even bundle) flights, hotels, tours, et al.), through a web site that sells only cruises, and through travel agents or cruise agents that offer their personal advice and services. Most agents charge little for their services unless you have special requests/needs. Beyond on-line sources, ask neighbors who travel, or look near home for an agency. Be selective and you'll often find someone who can help – for complex trips, good advice and travel arrangements can be very useful, or even crucial.



Queen Mary 2 in Wellington, New Zealand

- Make all deposits and final payments by credit card. You'll enjoy the best possible protections by the issuing bank should anything go wrong. Debit cards rarely provide such.
- When on-line, assure you are looking at a reputable on-line seller, i.e., look for credentials. Cruise specialists are certified by the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), and will show a seal authorized by the CLIA. Many of their staff are trained agents; some specialize in certain cruise lines, with detailed insights into what any ship or cruise offers.
- If you become a repeat customer, sellers may offer to assign you an agent who can learn your preferences, and (with multiple cruises over the years) can give advice and services, help with problems encountered as your trip approaches, even offer notices about unpublished deals, information which is unavailable just on-line.

Once you've found one or more cruises that suit you, you'll want to know the *full costs* and terms, including port fees and taxes, options on how to get to and from the port easily and on-time, what the cruise contract calls for, and other details rarely reflected in brochure or web-site prices or pages. Prices shown are per person, for double occupancy in a cabin usually designed for two adults. If you have a group of 3-4 (e.g., family), the per person cost for the third and fourth in the same cabin (designed for 3-4) may be lower. Prices shown will reflect port fees, but not taxes because taxes vary by your home country (sometimes state/province) and other factors. Taxes will be shown in invoiced quotes of cruise costs specifically for you; if not, the invoice is incomplete, inaccurate, and possibly bogus.

You may be able to extend the cruise you're looking at economically *if* cabins are available. Book any extension very-preferably at the same time you book the initial cruise segment, at least well before cruise start. You can ask about an extension just before or after embarkation, but you'll have *little hope in high season* when cruises are quite full, and virtually no hope of occupying the same cabin.

If you wish to cruise alone (e.g., in a double-occupancy cabin), you will often face a "single supplement" charge, often equal to the cost of a second person. Expect to be quoted "double" because cruise lines dislike single cruise guests in cabins (even if they pay the double price for the cabin); the ship can't earn other revenues from you in the restaurants, bars, and shops on board, as well as for other services. If cruising alone remains crucial to you, you should allow an informed cruise/travel agent to help you choose it and a cabin.

To better understand cost details, how they work and the meaning of basic cruise contracts, at least look for and digest related articles in travel/cruise web sites before you decide to book. Many of their terms are based on international maritime law and the laws of the country where the ship is registered, rarely those of a traveler's home country. And they will favor the cruise line — another reason why quality travel insurance becomes important.

Unless you have considerable experience with choosing and booking a cruise, consider using an agent. He/she should help you considerably to understand the contract, all fixed costs, all options available and their costs and import. Before you buy any cruise or package, he/she should provide a full invoice reflecting all costs and the basic cruise contract, and will explain non-cruise arrangements needed (e.g., see "Getting to port" below) for your careful examination. This allows you to question details and request changes.

If you still wish to book on your own (e.g., on line or by phone with the cruise line), as you approach the "buy point", you should be offered a quoted full price (including all taxes and fees) based on all the parameters you've chosen, *and the cruise contract*. If buying on-line, examine (and print) the invoice and contract to examine them. Once you concur with the terms, use the same parameters to return to the offer and complete your booking. (More than a few days "examination" may result in some changes to costs, so

be prompt.) Once you book a cruise on your own, you become wholly-responsible for the many details surrounding it (many explained later). You'll have to wisely arrange them on your own. All must complement each other, e.g., per "Flying to/from port" discussed below.

Travel insurance

For a more in-depth discussion, see [Travel insurance](#)

If your trip starts to gain complexity or substantial cost as you plan it, or you are a first-time cruiser, you should consider travel insurance. Other reasons include if you intend to go on "adventure" or high-risk tours or activities (e.g., para-gliding), have any medical condition that could flare up and require treatment or evacuation, will be a great distance from home, there's possibility that a provider of essential trip services might go bankrupt, or if you've been forced to accept tight airline connections.

To be eligible for all available coverage, you usually must buy it shortly after you have booked your trip, specifically right after you make a deposit if well before the trip, otherwise as you pay all in-full at once. Its cost will basically be determined by your total trip cost (except costs and obligations which can be cancelled at no cost or with partial or full refund), the age of travelers to be covered, levels of coverage, and options for coverage requested for certain problems, e.g., treatment for sickness or injury (on and off the ship), or medical evacuation. **Good insurance** will cover pre-existing medical conditions if purchased promptly after booking your trip, and often not if bought later.

You may obtain better insurance rates and/or coverage by buying coverage through or from an association you belong to, e.g., AAA, AA, AARP.

Travel experts recommend against "insurance" from airlines or cruise lines.

- Coverage offered often focuses only or primarily on the responsibilities of the line, while a quality policy will cover all elements and risks of your end-to-end trip, with options for many risks that apply uniquely to you.
- Cruise line protection (for a fee) covers selected cruise risks, and is not actually insurance. No law or government agency has jurisdiction over their terms, and specific assurances about promises of protection may be lacking. The fee for promised protections may amount to a large fraction of regular, well-purchased, overall trip insurance.

Other resources

Several websites provide objective information about various cruise lines, ships, cruising regions and ports, and how to choose, prepare for and go on a cruise. Many offer professional reviews, some offer passenger reviews. But because they often sell cruises through third parties, they cannot be listed here. To find them, use a good search engine, with "cruise" and "advice" or "review" as keywords among your search parameters.

Those sites and travel magazines discuss other valuable topics, e.g., "wave season" (when to book, not when to go) versus other times, understanding what's included (and not) in prices shown, industry trends that may cause prices to go down. A good travel/cruise agent will have those and other insights. *Knowing exactly when and how to best book a cruise* receives nearly constant attention in travel articles, and *approaches being an art*.

Cabins

Your accommodations can range widely: they are usually determined by cost. Most cruise lines promote their ships as luxurious, and cabin (aka stateroom) furnishings can range from quite "nice" to "utterly elegant". The less expensive tend to be quite a bit smaller than ordinary hotel rooms—space you may only use for a few hours each day to sleep anyway. But every square inch is usable, e.g., luggage fits under the bed to allow you to unpack many/all items and hang them in closets or store on shelves/in drawers for easy access.



Cabin on the Wilderness Discoverer

Cabin grades and categories

On large ships, you'll find a number of cabin grades or categories within each cabin type. They involve location, size, quality of view, features, etc. Good travel/cruise agents have access to the nuances of features and shortfalls for each. Cabin costs will vary not only by type but by those gradations/categories. For any cabin type, costs reflected in brochures and on web sites usually apply to the lowest grade. One useful site (among many) for information on ship layouts and features is [CruiseDeckPlans \(https://www.cruisedeckplans.com/DP/deckplans/\)](https://www.cruisedeckplans.com/DP/deckplans/).

Cabin types

The basic types include:

- **Inside** cabins are the least expensive and located in the interior of the ship, hence the name. They lack any window, and ship's air is "piped-in". On some new ships, they may have live video displays "fed" by exterior cameras.
- **Ocean view** have windows that don't open (the ship's air is "piped-in") and are slightly more expensive. The least expensive may have partially or substantially obstructed views.
- **Balcony/veranda** at even higher prices, with outside chairs, perhaps a table, to watch sunsets, have a room-service meal or treat, and watch passing ships and land. On older ships, the least expensive may have partially or substantially obstructed views.
- **Mini-suites** and **full suites** (the latter often multi-room) with private verandas, shower/bathtubs, sitting areas, perhaps hot tubs and other amenities, and at the highest prices.

Perhaps oddly, suites and the least expensive cabins tend to sell out first.

Cabins designed for the disabled will have many handrails, flat thresholds and wider doors to aid accessibility and safety. Some cruise lines cater to such clientele by offering greater numbers of prepared cabins. Many may have an ADA (American Disabilities Act) certification.

A few other cabins and all hallways have handrails for safety during occasional rough weather. On ships built in the late 1990s or later, few passengers will be:

- Bothered by pitching and rolling of the ship; they're built with highly-effective stabilizers.
- Disturbed by the ship's engines or screws (propellers); they're very quiet.
- Disturbed by public announcements; these are heard in hallways and public areas. For key announcements, they are piped into cabins; all can be heard in cabin on a designated TV channel.

Features

- Virtually all cabins have twin **beds**, usually joined to create a generous queen, with side tables/drawers or shelves. If you prefer them separated, let the cruise line know. Suites may have king-sized beds. (See also "Sleep" below.)
 - Cabins configured for families may also have a pull-down or wall-mounted bunk-bed, sleeper sofa or settee, or another twin/queen bed.
- All come with a **small safe**. While on board, you should lock all valuables in it (e.g., fine jewelry, passports, charge cards, cash), and leave them there unless needed, e.g., for a port visit, shopping ashore or dressing for dinner.
- Expect to find a large wall-mounted mirror or two. Handy for checking your appearance, they also make the cabin seem bigger.
- Small **private bathrooms with showers** are the minimum, with better cabins offering more space, shower/baths or larger showers. Each type will offer at least minimal toiletries typical for a motel (if you need specific ones, bring them or buy them near the port), small cabinets and shelves for all toiletries, at least one counter and lavatory, a toilet that operates by power suction, and a portable or installed hairdryer. Operate the toilet exactly as instructed.
- All will have a **phone** with wake-up call capability (synchronized to the ship's time).
- Virtually all will have a **TV**, some even an attached DVD player.
- All will have at least a reach-in **closet** with a hanging rod, some hangars and a shelf often holding your life-vests. You'll also find storage drawers or shelves elsewhere. Suites may have walk-ins, with numerous shelves.
- Better cabins resemble hotel rooms and may have a **settee, desk with chair** or more.
- Better ships/cabins often offer a small **refrigerator**, holding chilled cans and bottles for sale. If you bring your own drinks, ask the cabin steward to empty it of items for sale, which can be very pricey. Then put your own in it.
- **Power outlets and wattage are minimized**—this is essential to avoid fire risk.
 - The bathroom should have a low-wattage, usually 120 V 60 Hz outlet, adequate for such as a shaver, and a 220 V outlet for the ship's hair-dryer if it's not built-in.
 - If the dryer is not installed in the bathroom, a 220 V outlet may be near the bed or desk, likely with a portable hair-dryer stored nearby.
 - Near the bed or desk, you may find one or two low-wattage, usually 120 V 60 Hz outlets, adequate only for such as a laptop or to charge electronics.
 - **Net result: Don't bring your own iron, or use your own hairdryer or anything that heats food or liquid.** If found during embarkation, they may be seized. If used, they may trip a circuit breaker serving other uses and cabins.
- Knowing these features and limits, experienced cruisers variously bring:
 - A short, well-made 120 V extension cord to use low-wattage items at convenient locations.

- One or two nite-lites in case needed.
- A small, plug-in surge arrester, to prevent electrical damage to personal electronics.
- For warm climates, a small fan. Cabin air conditioners effectively but slowly change cabin temperature, but airflow is often modest. A fan can help cabin comfort substantially.
- A power *converter* and adapter plugs if your electronics aren't compatible with available cabin power, or if you'll travel before or after your cruise where power is incompatible.
- Some form of air deodorizer; balcony fresh air (if you have one) quickly helps but can also quickly compromise cabin air temperature and humidity.

Cabin location

Location can affect price somewhat because parts of a ship are more desirable for some passengers, e.g.,

- To avoid the effects of ship's rolling or pitching, some opt for a cabin on a lower deck or closer to amidships.
- To sunbathe on their balcony, many choose a deck well below any over-hanging upper deck.
- Those who need quiet to sleep should choose locations away from lobbies and elevators, and with at least one deck between their cabin and any place with late-night revelers, e.g., nightclubs, showrooms.
- Those with mobility challenges may prefer to be near elevators.

Other

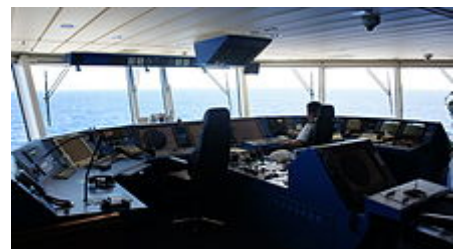
Cabin water is fully potable, usually obtained by reverse-osmosis, so efficient that some large ships visiting ports with water shortages may offload potable water. (It does not substantially soften the water.) Older ships may use distillation supplemented by fresh water on-loads. All ships carefully treat the water to ensure its safety. Taste in cabins may be somewhat bland or have a hint of chemicals. Elsewhere, water often receives additional filtration to assure excellent taste for use in bars, dining rooms, kitchens, and buffet self-serve drink dispensers.

As you get interested in any cruise, ship or cabin type, go to the cruise line's web site and others for more details. Again, a good travel/cruise agent can help you find the features you need or want.

Key ships officers

The ship and your cruise depend on them. Just a few of them include:

- The *Captain*: He or she is called the *ship's master* for a reason, with total operational command and responsibility of the vessel and when and where it goes. Depending on the ship's nation of registry, some may be able to officiate at weddings, as can accredited, "resident", or pre-certified clergy.
- The *Hotel Manager*: In charge of all staff that deliver on-board services, e.g., Purser/Customer Services, food and bar service, cabin staff, tour office, shops and nearly countless behind-the-scenes support staff.
- The *Cruise Director*: Responsible for all entertainment, special activities, key briefings and



Bridge on the Norwegian Jade

announcements, and any port or shopping advisers.

- The *Maitre d'* for your dining room, the *headwaiter*, and (perhaps) most-especially *your waiter* for the area where your table is located *if you have opted for traditional evening dining* (see "Eat" below). They stand ready to make special arrangements for you on-request such as birthday or anniversary celebrations, table changes, and special or required dining needs, e.g., food allergies, special diets.

Get in

The best-known destinations for cruise ships are tropical ports in the Caribbean or the Mexican Riviera, the Mediterranean and Northern Europe, but cruises can be found almost anywhere there's enough water to float a ship and cities or sites to visit. Cruise ships of various sizes visit the coasts of Alaska, the Nordic countries, South-East Asia, East Asia, southern Europe, Australia and New Zealand, Oceania and New England; and various islands of the Pacific Ocean. Even the North Pole and Antarctica are now destinations, though the latter has emerging ecological questions.

In addition, specially designed *river boats* and *barges* ply navigable rivers and lakes of Europe, China, Brazil, Egypt, North America and numerous other places. However, as noted above, this article focuses on ocean cruising and ships.

What to pack

For more discussion, see Packing for a cruise and Recommended dinner dress under "Eat" below.

This can vary substantially according to the region you'll cruise, e.g., clothing for cool/cold areas versus warm, conservative colors for Europe, items to cover arms and legs as you enter many religious buildings worldwide.

If you'll fly to/from a cruise port, see Flying for other advice and suggestions. Many experienced cruisers find certain items necessities, e.g.,:

- *Polarized sunglasses* with strong light filtration, including **full UV protection**.
- *Sanitizing wipes or solution*. If you purchase any, look for active sanitizing ingredients beyond just alcohol. Most intended for hands have a glycerin base to prevent drying skin. Avoid using them on hard surfaces as they leave an undesirable residue.
- *Skin protection*. Essential for all cruises, the sun not only strikes you from above, but is reflected off the water on boat excursions and at beaches. See the article on Sunburn and sun protection. Pack and use protection, e.g., adequate clothing, brimmed hats, "fresh" sunblock with high UV A/B protection ratings (yes, it has a finite shelf-life). Ship's stores have some such items but charge dearly for them. You'll also find them ashore, but usually at a premium over offerings at home.
- *Binoculars*. Most passing views from ship are at a considerable distance.
- *Duct tape*. Useful to make temporary repairs to luggage and other items.

Essential papers

Any authority looking at airline tickets, boarding passes and passports will examine names carefully. TSA and other security authorities often require that key papers (e.g., airline tickets, passports, visas, ship boarding passes) **precisely reflect your full name**. This applies to all persons in your travel group, e.g.,

spouse, children (toddlers perhaps excepted). It starts by making sure that whoever books your cruise (and any associated airline tickets) accurately enters each full name on reservations and later-generated tickets.

Passports and visas

Unless your ship's itinerary is confined to your home country (not often), you must prepare for a cruise as you would for any other international trip, to include passports, perhaps visas. Many countries to be visited may levy few or no visa requirements on day-visitors via cruise ship. But, check with the cruise line (through your agent if used) well ahead of time. Some lines will arrange needed visas for scheduled port visits, but also check specifically for visa requirements if you have an international flight itinerary.



Cruise ship leaving Miami

- The cruise-line will often insist that your passport have **more than six months** before it expires as of the date your international travel ends. They are echoing requirements of countries the ship will visit and/or where you'll fly, e.g., many that require visas will not issue them for passports with less time.
- Lacking a passport, or any required visa, you risk being **denied boarding** on your departing flight or ship at embarkation without refund or other compensation. Your resulting expenses *may* also not be covered by travel insurance (you have a duty to fully prepare for your entire trip).
- If your passport is stolen during a visit ashore during an international cruise, you will be left stranded; the cruise line will not let you return to the ship.
- Traveling with a criminal history may invalid your visa. Even a person driving the short distance from Seattle, Washington to catch a cruise in Vancouver, Canada could be refused at the border.

Very occasionally, port officials in certain countries will require review of all passenger passports before clearing the ship for passengers to go ashore. If so, they may join the ship a few days in-advance, and the ship will announce a day or so before the port visit that the staff must gather all passports for inspection or passengers will be processed in-person.

Before you leave home, make machine or photo color copies of at least the primary, facing pages of each passport per details in the above linked article. Use the passports when instructed by authorities, e.g., going through airport, airline or customs and immigration processing, or processing for initial ship's embarkation. Take the originals with you ashore on the rare occasion needed per ship's daily news or announcements. Otherwise, once on board, leave them in your cabin's safe and take the copies ashore (with government-issued photo identification) instead.

On your request, the United States can issue special **passport cards** (http://travel.state.gov/passport/ppt_card/ppt_card_3926.html) for possible use at land borders and on cruise ships. However, in the event something comes up and you need to fly home from an international port of call, they are not accepted for international air travel.

Boarding passes and tickets

Once booked and paid, you must promptly go to your cruise line's web site to **register**. Immigration authorities require that any ship leaving their jurisdiction have personal data of all passengers well in-advance of cruise embarkation. And your agent or the line may need to mail documents to you reflecting

that registration data. On the cruise line's web site, using your booking number, complete all details about all people in your travel group for whom you are responsible. If to informally travel with others, ensure they understand this. Data needed will include full names, addresses, phone numbers, social security numbers (or the equivalent for other countries), passport details, emergency contact names and phone numbers, how you want your shipboard account established/paid (an indicator, not a final commitment.) (see "Embarkation" and "Buy" below).

Once registered, within 60 days or so of cruise start, the line's web site will often allow you to print your boarding passes (see "Embarkation"). Others may mail them (and other information) to you as noted above. You may get one set of papers listing all persons in your group, or a set for each person. Web site or mail, you should also have the cruise contract and boarding instructions and times. If you've paid the line for flights or airport-to-port transfers, you should also find vouchers or flight tickets (or Internet links to them for printing at home). If you don't have these key papers in-hand in usable form at least three weeks before your cruise, notify your agent/cruise line immediately.

Per "Embarkation", each person will need his/her boarding pass and passport to be processed on board.

Cruise-line luggage tags

Tags showing your name, cruise ship, cruise date/identity/number and cabin number are *essential to ensure your large luggage reaches your cabin.*

- Some lines will send you durable tags in-advance, to attach at least to your large luggage. If so, they'll often come with your boarding passes and vouchers if you have prepaid transfers.
- Others will offer tags for you on-line. If so, print them (in color if possible). *Yes, they'll be on printer paper.* Then fold each as indicated into a narrow strip, and reinforce it with transparent package sealing tape. When you're ready to attach one, wrap it around a fixed luggage handle, information showing, and then staple multiple times or apply strong tape at the overlapping ends. The results can be surprisingly durable.
- If you make your own flight arrangements, you'll have to get yourself and all bags to the port/cruise terminal. You can wait to attach the cruise-line tags as you claim them at the end of your flight, but do so before your bags reach the port if possible. If you have no tags, porters at the terminal can create them using your boarding pass data.
- If you have arranged services through the cruise-line to transfer your checked luggage from the end of your flight to the ship, you need to attach the cruise tags as you check the luggage to *begin* flying. Before you leave the terminal at the port city's airport, **get confirmation** from any welcoming cruise-line staff about transfers and any responsibilities you have, e.g., if flying internationally, you may have to first claim your bags to go through customs and immigration processing before re-checking them into the cruise line luggage system at the airport.

Other essential papers

If travel is international, take no more **prescription medications** than you'll need on your trip—with convincing documentation that they belong to you and are necessary, e.g., properly labeled bottles with your name, perhaps a copy of the doctor's prescription. Leave the medications in and pack their prescribed bottles; otherwise, the meds lose their link to the prescriptions, and may be summarily confiscated as you enter or transit some countries.

- If any contain a **controlled or narcotic ingredient**, make absolutely sure you will not violate any law of any country you'll enter — even as a *through* cruise or flight passenger, e.g., as needed, have the country's written permission to carry the meds within its borders. Most

countries with restrictions will have ways to apply in advance for permission. If so, apply well in-advance, especially if hard copy postings are involved, e.g., such can require 1-2 months, while e-mail perhaps 1-2 weeks, even if your initial efforts prove incomplete.

- Some countries may have unexpected restrictions on entering/transiting with some basic medications, e.g., for Japan anything containing *pseudoephedrine* (Afrinol, Sudafed, Sinutab) or *codeine* (some cough and anti-diarrhea medicines). Always read the ingredients. Without prior permission to have them, they will be confiscated, and you may be arrested. You'll have to consult (and likely be examined by) a physician in the country to obtain replacement/substitute medication if it's available.
- Without action in-advance to comply with their laws, in a few countries for some medications the **consequences can be severe**, e.g., fine, arrest, possible prison.

Avoid **paying duty** on valuable items you take with you. You'll be exasperated as you return home if customs officials charge you duty for jewelry, a late model camera or electronics you took with you. See [Proof of What You Already Own](#)

If you have purchased **travel insurance**, take at least a summary of the policy coverage and how to contact the insurer for help from wherever you will go on the trip. And leave a copy of that with someone at home who can help with any actions needed or may benefit from its terms.

Flying to/from port

Cruise ships sail from an increasing number of port cities. Most people must fly to get to them. If that applies to you, you have options. They include **arranging your own** flights (discussed later), choosing a cruise line **fly/cruise package**, choosing a **cruise extension**, or making a **flight deviation request** to suit your needs/desires to/from the cruise.

For all those options, if you miss your ship's departure (actually from any port), **you are responsible** for joining it at its next port of call or getting home on your own. (That can be *very expensive* unless covered by travel insurance and you acted diligently to not miss the ship.) Some sources imply that ships will delay departure for flights their line has arranged that arrive late. More accurately, they may delay, but only if it doesn't compromise the ship's ability to reach the next port on-schedule. Accordingly:



[Hurtigruten](#) takes you along Norway's coast

- Fly to a departure port under the simplest possible flight arrangements (e.g., to avoid missed connections/lost luggage), scheduled to arrive in plenty of time for you to reach the ship's terminal **at least two hours before sailing**. Otherwise, fly to reach the port area the day before, even if it means you must pay there for an overnight stay, meals and transfers. (For return flights, see also "Disembarkation" discussion below.)
- If flying to a distant *overseas departure port*, plan to get to the port city/area at least a day before cruise departure, again despite the overnight costs and transfers. Such "day early" arrivals at distant ports are good industry practice and so should be offered by your cruise line in any fly/cruise package. Your insistence about decent flight routes and timing should not be treated by any agent or cruise line as a flight deviation request (discussed below). If you'll have a long flight, you'll appreciate the chance to rest after arrival anyway.

A **fly/cruise package** means the line makes all arrangements for you to fly to, go on and return from the cruise. This offers convenience and confidence for first-time cruisers or those going to/from unfamiliar ports. Those packages include air travel (economy, from/to select gateway airports), land transfers to/from ship, and may include lodging. Lines reserve seats well in-advance, anticipating demand by those liking the option (and for other uses). Those packages have trade-offs:

- They *usually* cost more than arranging your own flights and transfers; "usually" because some offers may be a good deal — an effort to help cruise line business. The line may want to develop new, expanded or unusual passenger or destination "markets", or it may be trying to fill empty cabins. Others may regularly offer "free airfare" or reduced air rates. Take care with "free". If you see anything in the trip description or the total invoiced/quoted cruise cost that in-effect refunds/rebates for air support not used, the offer really isn't free, but it still may be desirable.
- The line's choices of flights/routes are often made semi-automatically, emphasizing cruise-line cost-avoidance (e.g., using airline seats they've already blocked), then your cruise departure time.
- You have little control over their initial choices. Results occasionally have inconvenient flight times, use busy air hubs, have short connections, require considerable walking between gates/terminals, choose seats for group/family members apart from each other, and/or have quite long total times en route.
- If you have special needs that would affect transfers or seating need/preference, let your agent or the line know, preferably before the line makes initial flight choices. This may give you/your agent some leverage in later negotiations over cruise line choices. And some high-end cruise lines may offer premium flight seating at *relatively* modest cost, which is perhaps crucial for tall or "mature" passengers.
- The line will notify you of proposed flight details 45-60 days ahead of the cruise. Promptly examine them. If any detail appears problematic, promptly question its wisdom (through your agent if used), and decline to accept until corrected or explained to your full satisfaction.

Most lines also offer **cruise extensions**. You can opt to spend 2-3 (perhaps more) nights at/near a port area/city immediately before and/or after your cruise. Extensions can be somewhat to decidedly pricey, are integrated into your overall trip, with flight arrangements, quality lodging and transfers usually included. Meals may not be included; some may be. They may include one or more tours. The line should not demand any flight deviation fee (see below). Cruise brochures, your travel agent and the cruise-line's website will variously describe the extensions available. If travel involves flying overseas, and if you can, choose the number of days of the extension with intent to use at least some of the first day at the port destination to rest, with the remainder for exploring.

Flight deviation requests. A "deviation" is used to arrange flight dates for early arrival at the cruise port city/area, en route stay-overs, specific flight dates/times, aircraft cabin class, airlines or specific flight numbers that suit your preferences. The request must be based on what's actually possible, so your prior research is essential, or your request may be fruitless. For a fee (e.g., US\$75–150 per person), the cruise line will *process* (not book) your request for special flight arrangements. This request should preferably be placed through any agent that booked your cruise. You should formulate and submit it long before cruise start, and ensure it's understood by any agent used.

If your agent already knows of your needs/preferences, he/she *may* be able to negotiate minor changes to flight choices by the line with no deviation request needed or fee involved. If that fails, you may need/want a deviation. The line usually begins work to satisfy your deviation request after it has chosen/proposed initial flight arrangements, e.g., in a fly/cruise package. This may be a short time after you make full payment for the package.

- The later your request, the more difficult it will be to arrange, and likely more costly. (Cruise lines block seats in-advance, and they may be quickly spoken for. A late deviation request can force the line to quote you added costs to "cold purchase" necessary air tickets, at substantial extra cost to you even using their mass/wholesale contacts.)
- Your request may be one of hundreds being processed for that cruise, so make it simple, e.g., clear objectives with few alternatives/options; each requires some research by whomever works to help you.
- The more specific, "exotic" or luxurious your request (e.g., first- or business-class seating), the more expensive your deviation (beyond the deviation processing fee) will tend to be. After any negotiations, you'll receive (through your agent if any) the line's final offer of arrangements and cost and itinerary details. As above, examine each detail for feasibility and whether it meets your objectives.
 - If the cruise cost includes airfare, the line's web site or your invoice for the total cruise cost will usually include a sum reflecting a flight "refund". If negotiations for the flight deviation fail, you will (usually) have that sum to use as you look for flights on your own or with travel agent help if you wish.
 - If you've booked a cruise with prices that say "airfare included", and then you make a deviation request, watch out for unusually high air charges for minor changes to time, seating, route or airline. They may be an effort by the cruise line to recoup under-calculated air costs in the original price.
- If your initial request might be difficult to fill, you should first ask about the line's policy on deviation charges. If negotiations fail, many cruise lines won't charge the deviation fee.

Booking your own: If you're a seasoned traveler or have a good travel agent, you/your agent *may* do better by booking your own flights and lodging. This can mean better economy, flight dates and times, routes, seating and hotels you prefer. However, if your cruise starts at one distant port and ends at a different one, look at both self/agent-arranged flights and cruise-line fly/cruise packages.

- On your own, you may face buying one-way air tickets for all in your party. On many airlines, one-way domestic tickets can cost more than round trips on the same dates. For international flights, one-way tickets can cost more than twice as much as round-trips on the same dates.
- You/your agent may also be able to find "open jaw" tickets for less than one-way full-fare prices.
- As a last resort, you/your agent may know of budget web sites, flight packagers or brokers, or unscheduled airline charters. They may offer quality arrangements or "econo" bookings. The latter may require that all in your party be "flexible" about dates, routes, times en route, and on-board niceties. It occasionally involves need to claim luggage from one carrier while en route, take it to another carrier or terminal (even airport) and recheck it. Unless you are clearly "booked through" (as reflected on your detailed itinerary, later on boarding passes), the two or more airlines involved have no responsibility for making your arranged flight connections, for you *or* your luggage.

If you arrange anything on your own, keep any affected agent informed of your intent, efforts and results. Regardless of how you've gotten airline tickets, once you're booked, check frequent-flier miles you may have and if they apply. If you have enough, and "your airline" or "alliance" gets chosen to transport you, you may be able to use your "miles"/points for seating upgrades. Contact the airline directly.

Regardless of how arranged, ensure you have completely adequate scheduled connection times to make flight check-ins and flight connections (including possibly going through customs/immigration at some airports) en route to reach the start of your cruise, and for return flights. Include extra time for unpredictable delays. Consider everything that might make you late, e.g., flight schedules, "tricky" connections, seasonal

weather anywhere on your route, distance/time between the cruise ports and airports, ground transport dependability/availability, how far in advance you need to check-in for flights. If you don't have fully-adequate time, choose other arrangements.

Such complexity, risk and cost point to the usefulness of a travel or cruise agent and the importance of quality trip insurance.

Home to/from port by land

In contrast to flying, you might **drive** to your port city if practical without great effort and if the costs are right. With an adequate vehicle, you can take and bring home much more than allowed by air, which is quite useful for serious shoppers with family souvenirs, etc. It may allow you to visit the port area one or more days before or after the cruise. If it looks tempting, examine and compare:

- Using a hotel/motel park-stay-cruise package near the port. Some let you park for 7–14 days at no or small charge (but without assurance of vehicle security) and offer shuttles to/from the port. Certain web sites specialize in finding such offers.
- Driving and parking at a commercial parking lot near or at the port. They nearly always offer shuttles to and from the port. They can be pricey for multi-week cruises, but do offer some security for your vehicle. Lots in/on the port are often much more expensive than off-port.
- Renting a car or van one-way each way. If your group is 3 or more adults or a family, you'll need a sizable vehicle for all, to assure comfort and room for luggage. Renting lets you "up-size" as needed and avoid parking costs for long cruises. However, watch out for large drop-off fees, especially if the drive crosses state lines. Major rental brands should have an office for vehicle drop-off and pick-up near the port, often offering shuttles to/from.

If you can obtain quality, convenient **bus or train** service (as in Europe), you might obtain similar benefits, with simplicity and savings possible over a car. Examine the carrier's costs, reputation for punctuality, schedules, locations of terminals, transfers needed and any parking costs near home, and plan your departures accordingly.

Embarkation

This all starts as you reach your ship's terminal. The walking distance from ground transport to on-board ship can vary from 100–300 meters or more depending on terminal design and ship size. If anyone in your party has mobility challenges, request help in-advance.

If you'll board a large ship, examine the cruise line's instructions on when to arrive. Consider that:

- A large group will eagerly reach the terminal as early as they can—perhaps forgetting that the same staff (ship's, terminal and customs) that processes them will first have to help nearly all on-board passengers disembark. If you are also that early, you'll likely spend considerable time idle in line waiting to be processed, with no guarantee of seating, refreshments or shelter from the weather.
- Many other embarking passengers will precisely follow the cruise line advice and arrive at the designated time. That can create another line.
- Once all staff are ready to embark passengers, only very frequent customers of that line, or those who've booked suites, will receive any preferential processing.

So if you have a choice, consider reaching the terminal 30 minutes or so after the time mentioned by the cruise line. In any event, reach the cruise terminal at least **two hours** before the ship is scheduled to sail. As above, if your agent or cruise line has arranged a flight that *could* cause you to reach the port later, *seriously* question its wisdom well in-advance. If you're traveling in a group (e.g., family), don't begin embarkation processing without all members present.

At the cruise terminal, give your large baggage (virtually no limit on numbers, but don't pack *that* much), with cruise tags attached, to porters for mandatory, separate security screening, then loading on the ship. They deserve a modest tip. As above, if you have no tags to attach, the porters will help you to fill-in blank tags using details on your boarding pass.

You won't see those large bags until they arrive at your cabin door. Delivery may take 2–3 hours, perhaps more. If you've paid the cruise line for airport-to-terminal transfers, and you have no intermediate customs processing at the airport, you may not see your checked luggage after initial airport check-in until it reaches the terminal, perhaps even at your cabin. But learn the full process and understand your responsibilities.

As you start **in-processing** at the ship's terminal, officials will examine your boarding passes and passports. Then:

- You and your hand-carried items will be scanned, much as at an airport — but *without limits on numbers or non-alcoholic liquids*. If you hope to bring beer, wine or liquor aboard (in checked or carried bags), understand and pack for the cruise line's policy about what you are allowed to bring aboard. Policy can range from no restrictions to confiscation of any "no no" found during embarkation.
- You'll be instructed to fill-out and sign a simple **current health statement**, one for at least each person in your group. If anyone reports or exhibits symptoms of something that might be communicable, he/she may be interviewed. At worst, he/she *may be denied boarding*, at no liability to the cruise line. (Law requires ship's officers to minimize health risks to all the (perhaps) thousands of passengers and crew on board.) This event should be covered by good trip insurance.
- You'll be shown to a processing counter to provide identification, set up a **shipboard charge account** and be issued a **cabin key card** for each person in your group. (See also "Ashore" and "Buy" below)
- From there, you'll begin boarding. At the counter or on the way on-board, you'll each have an electronic **identification photo** taken, computer-linked to your cabin key/card. After that, you are free to board and walk about on-board. Later, as you disembark and re-board, you'll have to use your card, and the photos will electronically pop-up on a monitor used by ship's security staff.
 - On the way aboard, you'll often encounter a ship's commercial photographer. All pictures they take throughout the cruise have no cost unless you choose to buy one as you find it later in the ship's photo gallery. They tend to be rather pricey.



Elevator on the Carnival Fantasy

Once on board, a lounge or the buffet and casual food counters await, usually on upper decks. You'll often be instructed not to go to your cabin until their readiness is announced (your cabin steward is completely cleaning and sanitizing it, and changing all linens and towels in your cabin and many others). So, after food if any, it's a good time to walk about the ship to get oriented.

- Top-side you'll probably see a swimming pool or more, other sports and exercise facilities, bars, perhaps the spa and a forward lounge.
- Likely on lower, public decks, you'll find the Purser's Desk (aka Customer Service), often a concierge desk and shore tour ticket office, future cruise sales desk, perhaps shops (not open), and an Internet café somewhere.

Before sailing, there will be a **safety at sea briefing** that everyone must attend. Cruise lines and captains take this maritime law requirement seriously. You'll find instructions in your cabin, and papers and announcements will tell where and when to go. It includes learning the location of *your* emergency "muster station", ways to get there, emergency signals and procedures, and how to wear your life vest. You may or may not need to take or don your life-vest—stored in your cabin. All ship's services will be closed during this time. If anyone in your group has mobility problems, this is a good time to tell the staff for your muster station so they can prearrange special help for emergencies. *Truants will be called to a separate, later briefing* at staff's convenience. Continuing truancy can result in being ordered to disembark at the next port.

If time permits after the briefing and before sailing, go top-side for departure. It's always interesting, often scenic (take your camera if light will be adequate), with a bon voyage party likely.

Get around

The key advantage of a cruise ship is that it does most of the "getting around" *for* you. See "Understand" (above) and the following sections for details about ships and port visits. Basically, you unpack once, then visit the ports on your ship's itinerary and only repack at the end of the cruise. Careful consideration of the cruise itinerary and daily bulletins will eliminate confusion about where you are, what's happening, and where you'll go next.

As you explore the ship, you'll note that instead of numbers, decks may have fanciful names. You may find yourself referring frequently to the small pocket-map in your cabin and diagrams in elevators and stairwells to figure out where you are and whether the Lido Deck is above or below the Promenade Deck. The biggest ships can have 15 or more decks (counting bars and whatnot perched above the pools), making even the most conscientious stair-climbers resort to elevators from time to time. Thankfully, elevators will have an outside and inside list of facilities for each deck. But they often do not tell you if any is aft or forward, so again you'll need to look at the pocket-map. Beware some elevator banks may not serve all decks, For example, the forward elevators may only go down to deck 7, whereas the midship and aft elevators go down to deck 5, so you would need to take the forward elevators to deck 7 then walk aft to the midship elevators or stairs to access decks 5 and 6.

Nautical directions

Since you're on a ship, you'll want to learn at least a little bit of nautical lingo, especially for navigating the ship. The front of the ship is the **bow** and the back is the **stern**; all directions aboard the ship are relative to those two locations. If something is closer to the bow, it's **fore** or **forward**; if it's closer to the stern, it's **aft**. **Starboard** is to the right if you're facing the bow; **port** is to the left. And if something is in the middle of the ship (either fore-to-aft or starboard-to-port), it's **amidships**.

Only rarely does a ship fail to visit a scheduled port. This most often stems from adverse weather, rarely by equipment failure or accident. If weather threatens, the captain will avoid the effects of the weather as much as possible, and will make announcements explaining what is happening and if alternate ports will be visited.

See

Some ships have been outfitted with millions of dollars worth of art and elaborate interior decor, but generally after a few days there isn't *that* much to see on most cruise ships. The real sights are ashore. Some ships travel to geographically interesting areas such as [Alaska](#) or [Scandinavia](#) where they make efforts to view shorelines up-close, e.g., Fjords and glaciers. Generally speaking, the smaller the ship, the better proximity to scenery you can expect, because they won't need to stick to deep and open water. On large ships, other scenery may be too far off to really enjoy its details, though binoculars help. Depending on the region and season, you may spot whales, dolphins, or flying fish swimming nearby or even following alongside.

Lacking those benefits, the real sightseeing opportunities come as you approach and reach port, and as you take shore outings discussed below.

Taking photos

- Coasts are seldom straight lines, but if you are taking photos of the ocean, keep the horizon horizontal.
- If you plan on taking photos involving the ocean or distant objects, learn what situations recommend a UV or circular polarization filter, and prepare accordingly.
- Binoculars are essential when just looking at ships and coastlines, typically at considerable distances. If you plan to take photos of them, make sure you have a lens with focal length to magnify considerably.

Do

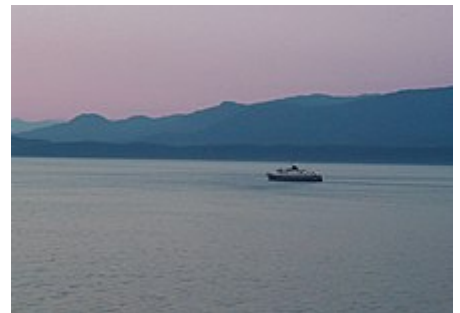
As you plan each day's activities, everything on-board will be based on **ship's time**. Depending on its itinerary, the ship will usually change its time to agree with any time zone it has entered. This assures that you can take advantage of all activities and tours, on-board and ashore, with confidence about time. Your cabin phone will be synchronized to that time, so feel free to use its wake-up call capability to ensure you miss no event.

Aboard

Large ships will have most or all of the features discussed below—mega-ships even more. Smaller ships (e.g., 600-1200 passenger capacity) will have many of them, but in fewer numbers or smaller scale.



One of the long corridors on the Mariner of the Seas



Cruising [southeastern Alaska's Inside Passage](#)

You'll be surrounded by water you can't swim in (it's passing by at 15-20 knots or so), but all but the smallest ships will have at least one "**swimming pool**" (perhaps covered, otherwise usable only in warm climates) and deck chairs. The pools won't be great for swimming laps, but some new ships are being equipped with small, swim-against-the-current pools. Most are filled with processed seawater. Parents of infants and small children (or staff on some ships. e.g., Disney) must ensure that their little ones create no safety or sanitary problem for anyone.



The swimming pool area and pool bar aboard MS Independence of the Seas

Without the legal restrictions imposed on land-based facilities, most cruise ships have a **casino** (not Disney). Expect more emphasis on gaming on ships catering to Americans than for Europeans. Don't expect table games or machines with payoff rates even close to those found in better land-based casinos; concessionaires pay dearly for the space. It will be open for gaming only while at sea. If you do win a substantial amount of money, ask to have your earnings given to you in the form of a check. Otherwise, you may have to carry and protect cash. (You could have the prize converted to shipboard credits, but on many ships unused credits are not refundable at cruise end: you will lose them. Wisely using a very large number of credits by cruise end may be no small feat.)

On larger ships, Las Vegas and Broadway are the models for **entertainment**. They'll variously feature singing-and-dancing shows, feature singers, comedians, magicians, jugglers and other live entertainment. On large ships, they'll be presented in a large theater; on small ships, they'll use a lounge with stage. Shows typically follow dinner, but may precede it for those who opt for "late" dinner seating. During and after shows, other venues offer small bands, piano bars, and dancing to live music or a disc jockey. Special cruises focused on certain types of music or performers/bands will use many of the same venues.

For culturally- or geographically-important destinations or special events, ships will often offer knowledgeable **lecturers**. Some ships provide on-board **chaplains** to conduct religious observances, although this is becoming less common outside peak times, e.g., Christmas, Easter. To bolster this at other times, they may welcome credentialed passengers (with necessary accouterments) as volunteers to conduct services.

A **movie theater** is found on most ships, playing movies similar to those found on airlines. There is usually a **library** on board for your reading pleasure but don't expect the latest novels unless left behind from an earlier cruise. If cabins have DVD players, the library may have a modest collection of titles. It may also offer electronic or board **games** to check out. Quite commonly, you'll find an **Internet café** (discussed later) offering several computers with a networked printer. Topside you should find someone issuing equipment for basketball, table tennis, shuffle-board and other uses.



Theatre in MS Eurodam

The ship will often offer space and seating to support impromptu or organized **bridge**, even tournaments. And staff very often have **trivia and other contests**. And on most sea days, you'll see at least one large **Bingo** session offered.

Shopping is readily available, with shops on board. (See "Buy" below.) They'll be duty free but don't expect big bargains. They too will be open only while at sea.

Weddings at sea are possible on some ships, such as the Bermuda-registered Princess line, but require advanced requests and planning to be feasible.

You'll receive a **daily newsletter** with a schedule of **activities**, apt to mention *art auctions* (reportedly the "most dangerous place on a ship"), *bingo*, *kitchen tours*, *port and shopping lectures*, *cruise enhancement lectures* (by naturalists, historians, political scientists, et al), *arts and crafts lessons*, *poolside contests*, *dancing classes*, etc. Family-oriented cruises (especially Disney) will have many *age-specific activities* and staff, geared for kids and teens.

Most ships have a **gym or health center** with exercise machines. They often offer instruction programs in exercise regimes or Tai Chi, etc., at modest cost, which may need to be booked beforehand. Many people use the "promenade" deck or topside track for walking/jogging. The former usually loops around the ship on a mid-deck &ndash, but may have stairs that interrupt you. If so, a topside track might be better if available (often the sun deck is available for joggers at a certain time, usually in the morning). Some ships find room for putting greens, golf simulator, a basketball or tennis court (enclosed by ball-catching nets) topside. Some very-large ships have ice rinks, rock climbing walls, "surf parks" and other activities.

Spa facilities are a staple of cruise ships. Everything from massages to hairdressing to exotic health and beauty treatments are available at substantial extra cost.

Some European based ships may have a deck for **naturist sunbathing**, this is the uppermost deck in order to prevent other people from looking. However, as the uppermost deck usually has the best views, it happens that people get up on this deck with their camera. This is of course prohibited.

Ashore

You must use your **cabin key card** every time you leave and re-board the ship. It's how they determine if you're aboard and how ship's security staff recognize you. Otherwise, they might leave you behind.



A lifeboat from the "Pride of America", being used as a tender in Hawaii.

- You'll regularly be instructed to return to the ship at least 30 minutes before its scheduled departure.
- Near departure time, based on tracking of who's not aboard, you may hear announcements for certain passengers to contact the Purser's desk—they're "missing".

Research in-advance each place you'll visit. That can greatly enhance your cruise experience at little or no cost. Many ports and nearby sights are covered by Wikivoyage destination pages, travel web sites (e.g., [WhatsInPort](http://www.whatsinport.com/index.htm) (<http://www.whatsinport.com/index.htm>), and books.

The ship will usually dock at a pier. If none is available, it will anchor or moor off-shore, and ship's lifeboats or commercial boats will **tender** you to a convenient place on-shore. Your detailed itinerary will indicate how your ship will visit each port.

- If you're on a very large ship, tendering can take considerable time. Ship's tour takers usually go first, then "early-birds" who've obtained first-come-first-served tender tickets/numbers. Unless you've purchased a ship's tour, plan your time ashore accordingly.
- If weather generates rough seas at any port where your ship anchors/moors, tenders to shore may be unusable and so cancelled. If the ship cannot get you on shore at a port, the line *may* offer reimbursement for the disappointment, but *will* refund the cost of ship's tours purchased but cancelled.

Port visit times usually allow passengers to go ashore by 7-8AM, with ship departure often at 5-6PM. Earlier or later departure times can be affected by tides, distance to next port or special tour needs ashore; disembarkation may be delayed slightly by port customs clearance of the ship or passengers. At special stops, some ships may stay later, perhaps overnight or multiple nights.

The **shore excursions office** will offer a variety of sightseeing tours, cultural visits and organized activities (e.g., scuba, snorkeling, kayaking, bicycling)—offerings dictated by the nature of each port, its climate, time of year and time in port.



The port of Saint John's on Antigua. When you compare the size of the cruising ships with its thousands of passengers to the size of the town, it's easy to understand how important cruise tourism is for some island nations

- At major ports, tours often use large air-conditioned buses for 30-50 people. Popular ports will also have large numbers of air-conditioned taxis, sedans or vans with drivers/guides for-hire: cars able to carry 3-4 adults, vans for 6 or more.
- All-day tours often fill virtually all your time in port. You'll usually find half-day tours offered as well, morning and afternoon—worth considering if a walk-about or shopping before or after lunch also appeals.
- If you are a confident traveler or you've visited the port before and want to tour special locales, you may do well hiring a car with driver/guide to take a tour of your choice and design. It can involve just your family/group or 2-4 fellow passengers or so. Again, advanced arrangements may be advisable.

Ship's tours often cost more than equivalent tours negotiated independently with locals, e.g., you may hire a taxi or van with driver/guide at \$40–50 per hour for 4-6 people. In contrast, a half-day ship's tour can range from \$50–100 *per person*, with whole-days \$125–300. But for that extra cost, ship's tours provide:

- Great convenience in booking a tour, though advance research can greatly help your own arrangements.
- Some confidence about the itinerary if you will venture far from port.
- Some assurance in especially "entrepreneurial" locations that you won't be scammed by a driver or a pier-side tour "broker".
- Greater assurance that the ship will wait if your tour is not back on time. Again, it will wait as long as possible for ship's tours, and *may* wait for those on their own, but only if it can reach the next port on-schedule without high added (fuel) cost.

Very popular ship's shore excursions *may* fill-up many days before you set sail (they're purchasable on-line). You may be wise to research them and commit to some or make advanced, self-arranged alternatives, as justified, e.g., if:

- You have your heart set on swimming with dolphins or stingrays, or climbing a glacier.
- You're focused on a full-day tour at a truly special locale some distance from the port, e.g. the Normandy beaches from Le Havre.

Availability of tours heavily depends on location/tour popularity. For instance there are several operators and dozens of buses taking travelers from Cancún to Chichén Itzá. You won't see this on small, and less-visited Caribbean islands. With several cruise ships in port, tours anywhere may be sold out.

At some ports, ships must dock among commercial freight operations. Walking from/to the ship may be through unpredictably dangerous activity, even forbidden by the port authority. Look at the ship's newsletter for port conditions and listen for Cruise Director or port adviser announcements. At such docks,

most ships will arrange a shuttle from the ship to a terminal with taxis/buses, even to a shopping area or downtown. If so, look for details about a return shuttle as well. Lacking a shuttle, you should request transport that avoids the danger, and perhaps question the Cruise Director in-advance about safety issues.

As discussed in-depth below, the UV content of the sun can be very high on any tour, especially on or near water at any latitude during summer. Protect yourself. See "Stay healthy" below.

Buy

Money

Inform yourself about any possible additional expenses onboard **before** your trip – what's included in the price and what's not. Try on-line queries for "cruise" and "advice".

Cabin key. For both convenience and to foster a *casual-spending atmosphere*, most cruise ships run a "cashless" system in which you use your cabin key (card) to charge all on-ship expenses, sometimes except for gambling. Two or more cabin keys/cards can reference one credit card or cash account (cash deposit given in-advance), e.g., for couples and families. At the end of each cruise segment, the ship will use your credit card or cash deposit to settle the final balance of your account.

- You can obtain the *current balance of your account*, with a list of all charges, at any time, sometimes even on your cabin TV. You should review those details *at least* near the end of the cruise to allow you time to question any charge.
- If linked to your credit card, your account balance will be automatically charged to it; many lines charge your credit card with other expenses (explained before the cruise, e.g., staff gratuities) during the cruise. At cruise end, the balance is settled automatically—allowing use of your cabin key through the last evening.
- **You must personally settle any cash account.** This risks long lines at the Purser's Desk on the last full day of the cruise as many others also pay their accounts. Once paid, you may not be able to make any more charges before disembarking.
- At debarkation, anyone who has not fully settled their account will not be allowed to leave.

Better-equipped ships may offer one or more **ATMs**. They are usually to make gambling more convenient. Consequently, they usually offer only the currency used by the casino. And their fees tend to be quite high compared to banks ashore. If you require "foreign" currency for a shore excursion, the "Excursion" staff may have advice about where to get it ashore. Opportunity may also include using the ship's purser to exchange your currency for small amounts of local.

Account balance management

You'll be instructed to commit cash or a credit/debit card account to pay your ship's account balance. Charges to your account can include costs of drinks, tours, dining in specialty restaurants, merchandise purchases, spa services, etc. For many reasons, your account may receive credits, e.g., if paid tours must be canceled, or perhaps granted in-advance to frequent cruisers. Take care that you use all credits granted. None will be refunded, as cash or charge account credit at cruise end, with the possible exception of tour cancellations by action of the ship's staff.

Tipping

Tips on-board take two forms—the surcharges for special drinks, specialty restaurants and some services (discussed below), and (ultimately optional) tips for the ship's staff (not officers) usually levied at the end of the cruise.

Learn the cruise line's recommendations for **tipping** the ship's staff. They suggest "appropriate" *optional* amounts—a crucial part of staff income. Amounts recommended may vary somewhat by your class of cabin.

- Many cruise lines *add those amounts to passengers' shipboard accounts automatically* - this may be US\$12-15 per day per passenger. This method ensures that *all* staff contributing to your cruise experience (e.g., cooks, cleaning and maintenance workers), not just your waiter and cabin steward, *receive some extra income* and recognition.
 - *No automatic gratuities go to ship's officers.*
- You can opt to decline or adjust this automatic tipping as desired before cruise end. Royal Caribbean and others offer that option in advance, but may not make the option or how to exercise it obvious.
- As inducement to regular customers, some cruise lines and travel/cruise agencies may pay for gratuities.
- Whether automatically or in-person, any crew member who has especially enhanced your cruise experience deserves something — perhaps in-addition to automatic amounts.
- Many experienced cruisers find that a partial tip, to key crew members (e.g., cabin steward), at cruise start often has good results.

Some cruise lines or cruises have a "no-tipping" policy, often aimed at the European or other markets where tipping is culturally alien and may frighten customers away if charged. In reality, gratuities are built into the higher price of those cruises, on which passengers also pay taxes.

Shopping on-board

Cruise ships take advantage of their international/at-sea status to offer duty free shopping (e.g., for liquor, jewelry (costume and precious), cosmetics, perfumes) at decent if not outstanding prices. Large ships usually have boutiques selling logo clothing/souvenirs, perhaps offering casual and evening wear (a few even include tux/formal rentals). Other shops offer basic sundries, candy and over-the-counter drugs. All will be open only while at sea.



Grand Lobby on the Queen Mary 2

- You may see "sidewalk sales", specials on jewelry and watches, and toward the end perhaps a clearance sale on outdated logo clothing and other items.
- *All* bottled liquor purchased on-board will be held until the last full day of your cruise, and then delivered to your cabin, likely boxed, but needing more padding in the box to be ready for carrying or (with further preparation) to go in checked luggage to fly home.
- **Ship's merchandise** has no duty or tax prepaid as it's purchased/delivered on board, and so can be subject to duty payable as you return home *if* all of your trip purchases exceed your duty exemption.
 - If you contemplate purchasing an expensive item (e.g., jewelry, one-of-a-kind items), check if it is "customs exempt", e.g., was made in your home country, was already imported there and then sent to the ship, or really is one-up such as a unique artwork. If

so, with a proper certificate from the ship's store manager, you may not have to count the item against your duty allowance.

- If U.S. citizens exceed their duty allowance with on board purchases and return to the U.S. on the ship, the ship must (by law) provide notice of those purchases to the port's U.S. Customs office. Those passengers can expect "special" Customs attention. A few ships may arrange customs processing on board.

Caveat emptor (let the buyer beware) is good advice anywhere, and applies on-board. Cruise passengers are a "captive market".

- Few items in on-board shops will be great bargains. Also, cruise ships in international waters follow laws of their flag country and buyers may be treated unlike businesses on land; requesting consumer protections you normally enjoy at home *may* fail. However, cruise lines usually have overarching policies protecting buyers from all but buyer's remorse or careless damage to merchandise.
- Staff working in the **spa** or **gym** may tout very-expensive lotions/potions, services, tests or treatments with *claimed* health or other benefits. Before saying "yes", you should learn their certified qualifications and understand the realities about what they offer.
- There have been past cases where on-board auctions (usually by concessionaires offering rugs/carpets, paintings, etc.) have made unjustified claims of item value, offered counterfeits of famous works, or have influenced bidding in ways that would be illegal ashore in most countries. Fortunately, many of these practices have been greatly reduced as a result of major, successful class-action lawsuits. Basic advice: Buy what you like with discipline (to include costs for getting the item home), not as an investment.

For cruises in Europe: The European Union (EU) has begun levying its VAT on all shipboard sales and services (including service fees) on any cruise segment that departs and ends in the EU *without visiting a port outside the EU* (or the EU VAT area). Because this can materially degrade on-board sales, lines are (re)designing many cruise segments to visit "outside" ports, e.g., Gibraltar, Casablanca.

Shopping ashore

Shopping remains a highly popular activity, with nearly all ports offering at least handicrafts and souvenirs reflecting the destination, but often not made there. (A crude rule of thumb for "local" souvenirs: the farther you venture from the dock area, the lower the prices may be for given types of items.) Others offer wide ranges of merchandise, to include cameras/lenses, clothing, electronics, jewelry and "gourmet" consumables. If there is a chance that you'll use your credit, debit or ATM card to buy them:

- Let the issuing bank know in-advance where and when you'll be traveling — always a good practice anyway.
- Follow good practices for ensuring it won't be lost or misused by others. See Money for a full discussion.

Certain destinations may offer "**serious shopping**": duty-free and/or highly competitive, e.g., Saint Martin and Saint Thomas in the Caribbean, (perhaps except for "designer stores") Hong Kong and Singapore if you bargain successfully. For example discussion of duty-free shopping and customs obligations, see Saint Thomas#Buy. If inclined to seriously shop somewhere not familiar to you, on-line research should help you understand what to expect, e.g., stores, tax/duty, and what to watch out for.

The ship may have a *port shopping adviser* who can provide useful information and may recommend (even tout) certain merchants and brands/items. Those advisers are often employed by merchandising firms that receive large fees (even commissions) from merchants and brands they recommend. This does not

guarantee (or impugn) the reputation of any merchant or brand, nor should it question the worthiness of competitors — though the "adviser" may mention a special guaranty for touted merchants. Their fees may well increase the final prices that "recommended merchants" demand. In desirable shopping locales, most merchants are quite responsible.

At other locations, take care with merchants, product claims, warranties, fixed, labeled and negotiable prices, and *final costs* beyond agreed prices, e.g., hidden duty or tax. Though eligible for tax/duty refunds, you may be able to obtain them only at certain places as you leave the jurisdiction, e.g., airports, and only for each purchase that exceeds a substantial amount. At the last port for a taxing jurisdiction, the port may have no "standing", nor an office offering to provide or process refunds. Getting refunds by mail after you are home can be problematic.

Such challenges cause serious shoppers to seek out cruises to truly duty/tax-free and highly-competitive locales. Wherever you plan to shop, some research should help you understand each port and its merchants, what you may see, and what it costs elsewhere.

See also [Shopping](#) and [Bargaining](#).

Eat

Most lines heavily invest in food quality and quantity, and they brag about it. Rarely are meals not included in the price of a typical cruise, with the occasional exception of specialty restaurants and room service.

Included offerings include poolside **snack bars** where you can order a burger, "dog", shake, pizza or something, and walk off without paying. It's not "free", of course; you paid for it when you bought your ticket. On virtually all cruise ships, you'll also find a **buffet**, usually on one of the upper decks, available during all meal times and usually offering something from early morning to late evening. On better ships, buffets can seem almost like pure extravagance. **Room service** is usually available at all times, except after a certain late time the night prior to disembarkation on most cruise lines. Sometimes, you may have to pay a gratuity or late-night surcharge for it.

At normal meal times, you'll find **seated dining** with full waiter service, usually with a multi-course menu featuring variably fancy dishes. (*Damp swimwear can damage dining room chairs; don't wear it there, even under a wrap or cover; even if quite dry, you might alarm the dining room staff.*) At least one dining room will offer **seated breakfast and lunch** (you'll rarely have a regularly-assigned table). It will be open for 2–3 hours around the usual time for any meal. For breakfast, the menu may not change much each day. For lunch and dinner, the menu will change every day. For dinner, it will usually have a section for items always available, and one for the evening's "specials".

Traditional evening dining service is at set times, usually early/main and late sittings. If you choose or prefer a time and table size (best when you book your cruise), you'll be seated at the same table at that time every evening.

- If your table preferences haven't been met (at least indicated on your cabin key card), contact the maitre de for help as soon as possible after embarkation.
- Exceptions to your usual time and table may occur when the ship is in port and many passengers are eating ashore. The daily newsletter will mention this. If so, you may share a



Restaurant on the Norwegian Dawn

different table with "strangers", even in a different dining room.

Table size can vary from 2 to 8-10 people, occasionally more. Round tables for 6-8 seem conducive to easy conversation among all. Unless you/your group fully occupies a table, you'll meet other guests as table mates. This is usually an interesting time, with repartee beyond what's possible with a new set of strangers at "open sitting" (see below). It also *helps your waiters learn and anticipate important needs and preferences*, e.g., kosher, vegetarian, *food allergies*, drink preferences and timing.

To assure well-timed service, *reach your table within 30 minutes of when the dining room opens for your sitting*. Large kitchens must serve several hundred (perhaps thousands of) passengers at each sitting, one course at a time, with expectations of freshness and proper temperatures.

Many cruise lines offer **freestyle, choice or open seating dining**, which allow dining at any time during dinner hours. This may be offered in separate dining rooms, but menus will be the same as for scheduled sittings. As you enter, you may have to wait for a table, just as you would without reservations for restaurants at home. If it's especially busy, you have just a few in your party, and are willing, tell the Maitre de that you "will share". It greatly helps him/her efficiently use tables/seating, so may speed getting you seated.



The restaurant of a smaller river cruise ship

Most ships also offer **specialty restaurants**, often with international themes, usually by reservation only. (If you have no reservation, you can try "will share", but don't rely on it; most diners who've made reservations there don't expect to share.) Many such restaurants have surcharges (e.g., \$20 per person or more) for *exceptional service and dishes*, most well-deserved. If you normally dine at a fixed sitting but plan to use a specialty restaurant any evening, tell your regular waiter the evening before.

Recommended dinner dress in dining rooms varies somewhat across cruise lines. For details, each cruise-line explains its expected dress code on its website, and you should find details on web sites for cruising.

- Many "main line" ships declare dining for most evenings as requiring just "country club" or "resort" casual wear: collared shirt and slacks for men, nearly anything but pool wear for women (we jest). They'll also often have one or two "formal" nights per week: tux or dark suit and tie for men, evening wear for women.
- Some cruise lines (e.g. MSC) operate a more casual dress code where e.g. jeans and T-shirts are acceptable on all but the designated "formal" dining nights.
- Some luxury lines may declare every evening as semi-formal—coat and tie for men, evening wear for women.
- For any evening, the same dress standards apply in specialty restaurants.

You'll embarrass yourself, your table mates, your waiter and others if you go to your dining room for dinner wearing jeans, shorts, a tank-top, or similar casual/pool-wear on a cruise where this is frowned upon, and inadequate dress on formal nights on any cruise. You may also be denied seating.

If you have no interest in "seated dining" on formal nights (or any evening), you can use the buffet for dinner instead. Food offerings will be somewhat similar to that in the dining rooms that night, but often lacking items that require complex service. Dress here includes covered pool wear. The buffet indirectly offers another benefit: if you must fly to/from port, and may too-easily exceed your luggage limits (e.g.,

must pack for small children or seniors and yourself), consider leaving semi- and formal-wear (and related shoes/accessories) at home. You can reduce packing space and weight otherwise needed by perhaps 20-25 percent.

Drink

Typical staples such as coffee, tea/iced tea, lemonade, and juices (at breakfast) are available at no charge. Other drinks are usually not included in the cruise price, even if the cruise's promotional brochure says or implies "all-inclusive".



Bar on MS Eurodam

- Those "others" (e.g., *soft drinks, bottled waters, fresh-squeezed juices, specialty coffees, beers, wine, mixed drinks*) can be pricey. Prices listed will not include a 15-18 percent service fee/surcharge.
- Expect to find one or more well-stocked bars on all public decks, catering expertly to your preferences, many opening mid- to late-morning and some staying open very late.
- All dining rooms will have a very good wine list, with a few offerings by the glass, as well as bottled waters, mixed drinks and specialty coffees. If you don't finish a bottle of wine that evening, they'll gladly re-cork it and put your cabin number on it for recall at another time no charge. If you've brought your own wine (bottle) to dinner, they'll serve it but charge a "corkage fee"; if not consumed at that meal, they'll re-cork for later use in the same manner as a purchased bottle.
- The small refrigerator in your cabin may be filled with soft drinks, chips or candies. Carefully note if they are charged for, especially if you have children. The convenience may overwhelm resistance despite the costs.

Many cruise lines offer **drink packages** for unlimited soft drink refills, some for specialty coffees, wine, even a few for mixed drinks. Many include the service fee. But, understand the terms clearly before committing to any. Examples:

- A "pop/soda pass" often runs US\$30–45 for a week (per person, not to be shared), which can equal 5-8 separately purchased drinks *every day*. (A considerable average daily consumption rate.)
- A mixed-drink package starts at US\$50 per person per day, while you can get a "beer and wine with your meal" package on some lines for US\$25 (Jan 2020). Most separately-priced drinks run US\$7–11 or so each. Again, this means a considerable daily consumption rate to make the package worthwhile, especially if you contemplate staggering, uh, going ashore.
- If you delay purchase of a package a day or more, the price often remains the same.
- You have no obligation to purchase any package type for everyone in your group. But the package terms forbid sharing your drinks with anyone.

Not counting the service fee, some mixed drinks may be cheaper than you might find at better watering holes ashore, but don't count on it. However, you'll usually find drink specials mentioned in the ship's daily newsletter.

These costs prompt some people to try to bring their own. But most lines forbid bringing liquor on board, and any found (at embarkation or as you board from later port visits) will be "held for you", and returned on the last full day of the cruise in the same packaging as received. A few lines confiscate contraband

liquor. A few others will allow you to initially bring 1-2 bottles of wine per cabin; if opened/decanted outside your cabin, you'll be charged the "corkage fee" as above. Most lines will allow you to bring your own soft drinks. For details, consult the cruise line web site.

Some ships are primarily **party vessels**, full of young adults taking advantage of bargain duty-free drinks and (perhaps) lower drinking ages in international waters. You may identify them by their *extremely uneventful itineraries*: straight out to sea, stay there for much of the trip, then back to port. Their advertising is usually also not particularly subtle. If you want one, you'll recognize the signs; if you want to avoid one, likewise.

Responsible cruise lines avoid unbridled drinking by:

- Requiring at least one occupant of each cabin to be a minimum age (with some exceptions for legitimate families) and by not serving alcohol to anyone under 21.
- Training and directing wait staffs to control service to those who've had too much.

Sleep

Let your travel agent or cruise line know your cabin needs in advance to ensure your cabin assignment and preparation meets them.

Shortly after arriving at your cabin, **introduce yourself to your cabin steward** as he/she stops by, and discuss any preferences or needs for service not already met, e.g., ice at certain times, softer or firmer pillows, emptying the refrigerator of unwanted items. He/she will often have an assistant, and will both work as a team. If you brought sanitizing wipes or solution, you might sanitize key surfaces like the lavatory counters, telephone handset, TV remote and desktop — the latter is often missed in their cabin preparation.



Twin Cabin on P&O MV Azura

For families, in addition to the bedding noted earlier, some cabins will have a pull-down bunk-bed (not appropriate for small children due to safety, or for full-sized adults due to height and weight) and/or a pull-out sleeper-settee or sleeper-sofa. If you've booked as a family, your steward will "unlock" any "pull-down" or pull-out, for your use whenever desired. It will be made-up each morning and prepared for use each evening.

If there are more than 2 adults, your cabin steward will prepare the second bed or sleeper-sofa each morning and evening. For 3-4 adults, ensure your agent or the cruise line chooses a cabin with at least some visual privacy for sleepers. Suites usually have such privacy, and often more options. The cabin steward (or butler) will be ready to explain use of all and prepare them as needed.

If your cabin is not as described, desired or needed on arrival, resolve the issues through your cabin steward before you retire the first night.

Stay safe

Because of the numerous advancements in modern shipbuilding and other technology, **cruise travel is generally very safe**. The crew of your ship are trained to calmly and efficiently handle emergencies that may arise. Occasionally, non-trivial problems may be discovered and addressed while going completely unnoticed by passengers.

Unlike the ocean liners of yore, cruise ships are not built for great speed or unusual maneuvers. Whenever feasible, they avoid bad weather even if this means delays, in deference to security and passenger comfort.

The press often recounts public incidents/accidents — a few deservedly, that may induce unnecessary cruise-customer concern.

- Cruise accidents resulting in serious passenger injuries or deaths are rare when one remembers that hundreds of ships are at sea at any moment nearly every day of the year. Cruise lines and every ship's captain and his/her crew regularly train for problems and inspect ship condition and sanitation to thoroughly minimize troubles.
- Stories about the frequency of **sickness outbreaks** often get overblown. The same maladies affect all travel and group occasions. Only on a cruise does enough time lapse for symptoms to surface 2-4 days after infection.



Lifeboat on the Queen Mary II

Aboard

Follow what you learned at the Safety at Sea briefing. In the event of a **life-threatening emergency**, instructions will be given on where to report (not necessarily your lifeboat or muster station designated in the briefing) and what to bring with you (e.g., adequate clothing, crucial medications, your life vest and cruise ID card). You'll know what to do if you're distant from your cabin. Remain as orderly as you can and do not panic as you muster or are evacuated; acting out of place will only make matters more complicated and increase chances of injury to yourself or others.

Be aware of your surroundings at all times, especially at night. Don't worry about going about on your own, just be vigilant around bars where late-night, intoxicated passengers are a possibility. Keep an eye on your belongings and don't flaunt nor take them with you everywhere; leaving your iPod on a pool chair unattended while you quickly order a drink is just asking for someone to snatch it. Lock expensive items and jewelry in your cabin safe, then use or wear it only when appropriate.

Families traveling with children should be cautious as well. While family-friendly lines like Disney are "age-proofed" for their safety, other lines and older ships may not be and there are many hazards that could put them in a dangerous situation; e.g. being left unsupervised on a balcony, falling down the stairs, swimming in a pool without a lifeguard, etc. Older teenagers should be given some freedom about what they'd like to do and where they want to relax during the cruise, but you should always know the whereabouts of younger children. Some ships even offer two-way, on-board "walkie talkies" for rent for your group to stay in-touch.

Very minor fires are not rare, especially in the many restaurant kitchens on board, e.g., in fryers. The crew is trained and equipped to deal with them. There is no reason to panic just because you see a crew member with extinguishing equipment.

Piracy incidents are virtually nonexistent in the regions of the world where most cruise lines sail (North and South America, Europe, etc.). It can be a legitimate concern to cruisers sailing some waters, e.g., near a few African countries and a few locations in Asia. However, no ship has ever been boarded by pirates if going more than 17 knots, a speed easily attained by cruise ships. Many ships plying those waters also have non-lethal means to "discourage" pirates.

Always report anything suspicious or concerning to a crew member; they will investigate or get someone who can to investigate the matter. Trust your instincts as well. If a situation or activity doesn't feel "right" to you, it may not be, e.g., substantial smell of smoke may be cause to activate the fire alarm.

Ashore

While you are safest while on-board the ship, this may not be the case ashore. It's useful to learn a bit about each destination you plan to visit beforehand and to act responsibly wherever you are.

When ashore, hold on to your boarding card as though it's your passport - without it you may not be allowed back on board without substantial delay. Actually, at many destinations, passengers won't need to present or carry their passport - the boarding card is enough. However, you should always carry at least a passport photocopy and government-issued photo identification as well as your ship's card.

Stay healthy

Sunburn

See also: [Sunburn and sun protection](#)

At sea, on beaches or small boats, bare skin can sunburn very rapidly between mid-morning and mid-afternoon. That ruins cruises for more people than any other cause. Sunburns (and their pain) can last until well after you return home. For a few, they may later induce permanent skin damage, and even cancer. So before you'll be exposed to sun for more than a short time, take effective precautions with clothing, a hat and highly-rated sunblock so that you can fully enjoy whatever recreation you choose.

Queasiness

No discussion here of any medication is authoritative. Consult your physician or pharmacist for any question or issue.



Typical pool area

Some people experience **queasiness** on cruise ships. This is very unlikely on large or recently-built vessels, which consistently have highly effective stabilizers. Even so, some sensitive inner ears may react to even imperceptibly slow and gentle rocking of a calm sea. Localized intense storms may make the ocean rough for a day or so. And very-occasionally, major storms can't be avoided, but full-fledged tropical storms always are.

- If you know or worry that it may be a problem, pick a cabin location that minimizes movement when the ship rolls and pitches; e.g., amidship and/or on a lower deck.
- Over-the-counter motion sickness medications (e.g., Dramamine, Bonine) usually help. (Reportedly, Dramamine has a tendency to cause drowsiness that can make it impractical to use for the duration of a cruise.)

- Prescription trans-dermal Scopolamine patches can be very effective. But a few people have troubling side-effects. So, (with the permission/help of a doctor) test a patch before the cruise if you like the multi-day convenience they promise.
- Some people find relief with special wristbands that claim to stimulate pressure points that are believed to counteract the nausea of motion sickness. Their effectiveness has not yet been clinically verified.

Staying well can be as simple as eating (and drinking) responsibly. Generous helpings of that beautiful, fresh pineapple for breakfast *every* morning can cause problems, as can the portions of *wonderful and rich delights at dinner*. Marine biologists know that the calf of a blue whale can gain up to 30 pounds per day. The next fastest weight-gaining mammal may be the cruise passenger - actually known to gain 6-7 pounds per week if he or she "over celebrates".

Care about exercise and choices of tours

If you exercise only occasionally or seldom, you may find the ship's gym tempting. "Exercise" some moderation in the same way you would with sunbathing to ensure it doesn't compromise enjoying your cruise. Similarly, available tours will demand different levels of physical effort. Whether privately arranged or offered by the ship, understand what each demands and choose wisely.

Outbreaks

Passengers and crew are susceptible to *communicable diseases* (e.g., the flu, colds, Norovirus), but thankfully this happens only *very* occasionally due to great effort and care by the ship's staff, and by passengers who cooperate with health protections. It occurs because large numbers of people from countless places have close proximity, share facilities, forget to be responsible, and stay aboard long enough for symptoms to appear.

Prevention

Most maladies spread much in the same ways as the common cold. Stifling coughs and sneezes into your sleeve helps greatly. And ships regularly provide hand disinfectant dispensers at entrances to dining areas; use them, but don't rely completely on them. You can help yourself if you:

- *Wash hands very frequently and thoroughly.*
- Substitute "elbow bumps" for handshakes with staff and fellow passengers; at the very least, wash up well after shaking someone's hand.
- Use sanitizing wipes or solution on key parts of your cabin occasionally. This is no criticism of your cabin steward, whose efforts will also be thorough, but an added protection nonetheless.
- Use your cabin bathroom rather than public restrooms whenever you can.

If you become ill

- Report it as soon as possible, very preferably by cabin phone.
- The medical staff can help considerably, may attend to you in your cabin, and may direct you to remain there and cancel any port visits until you recover (usually within a couple days) to avoid spreading the malady. *Such direction is often reinforced by law in ports.*

- If the illness is deemed the ship's responsibility (e.g., several other passengers have or have had it), you may not be charged for medical services and may receive reimbursement for pre-paid but missed ship's tours.
- Specially-equipped teams of ship's staff will thoroughly clean and sanitize any "accidents" in your cabin. So report them, and report public accidents as well.

Ships that see "possible signs" of an outbreak (even several passengers with sea-sickness) will set up extensive precautions and health/sanitation protocols to limit spread of any infectious agent. This can include hand sanitizer dispensers at entry to *all public areas*, barriers to self-help in buffets, nearly constant sanitizing of railings, door handles and public restrooms everywhere. Use and respect those measures.

Food and drink ashore

Although shipboard food and water will be sanitary, the usual precautions for overseas travel should be taken when eating and drinking ashore.

- Advance research about your port visits should include looking for possible health risks.
- In well-developed countries and touristy areas, food and water *may* be safe. In addition to research, consult the ship's port descriptions and the port adviser. Even with assurances, take care with sidewalk food stands and road-side cafés. Crowds of locals only indicate popularity and low cost, not necessarily safety.
- In less developed countries, ports and areas, take care to avoid local water and food-borne bacteria or parasites, including drinks made with ice a bar/restaurant may make using local tap water.
- If in doubt about getting water ashore, buy it in sealed, labeled bottles.
- Restrooms in "rustic" places in any country may have no tissues or napkins, so bring your own.
- As with safety, there might also be health risks ashore that are not present on-board — especially in tropical countries. Before your cruise, check the situation in each of the destinations you'll visit.

Carrying bottled water

Few ports prohibit bringing bottles of water ashore. You'll see pricey offerings each time you leave the ship. Ask a ship's officer in-advance if sealed bottles are necessary; if not, you could refill your own, with buffet beverage/water dispensers perhaps offering better tasting water than that in your cabin.

Medical staff

Nearly all cruise ships have one, with an accredited doctor. Larger ships may also have two or more nurses or even a dentist. Most will offer open hours ("sick call") in the morning and late afternoon for routine ailments, with on-demand response (even in-cabin) for injuries or major illnesses. Most can effectively render first- and second-aid, perhaps more depending on the doctor's experience and on-board facilities, e.g., X-ray. They carry basic medications and supplies typically needed for cruises. Don't depend on them to replace **special medications** you use, even with near-equivalents.

- If the ship's itinerary is quite repetitive during a season, the doctor *may* have standing with pharmacies in some ports. He/she *may* be able to issue usable scripts for your needs, but the ship's staff must pick up the medications at a fee to you. Again, don't expect the

pharmacy on an island to be stocked with the medications you require - in some cases "pharmacy" might only be a shelf in the harbor's convenience store.

- Unless your problem appears to have been caused by some condition or event that's the ship's responsibility, expect to be charged a fee for their services. Your regular health insurance may not cover such fees, but good trip insurance usually does.
- Some ships have modest **dialysis** capability. If you need it, learn in advance if it's the type you need and you can reserve time slots. If available and as needed, reserve the service/times through your agent if you used one. Check with your health insurance agent to see if your regular health insurance covers any or all of what will be a substantial cost. Also check (before you commit to initial coverage) if your trip insurance covers this need.
- Though the doctor and staff often wear ship's uniforms, many are concessionaires, not ship or cruise line officers. Nevertheless, for serious conditions, the doctor's decision about continuing your cruise under illness or injury will usually prevail. **Medical evacuation** can be unbelievably expensive, and so you should ensure it will be covered by your trip insurance.

Physical limitations

If you have **physical limitations**, have your agent arrange needed services in advance, e.g., wheelchair to embark/disembark, for port visits/during the cruise, perhaps even to rent a "power chair" motorized wheelchair (usually only available for round-trip cruises).

Connect

Calling

Many cruise ships are now equipped with **cell phone-to-satellite transponders**, which take over automatically at sea to provide wireless phone service throughout the ship. Your cell phone works just like at home and bills its usage back to your regular cell phone bill.

- As your phone switches over to that "Cellular at Sea", you are roaming at their pricey per minute rates — the allotment of minutes on your plan doesn't apply here. Data should work as well, but cost can add up fast if your phone automatically checks e-mail.
- Once the ship docks at a port with available cell service compatible with your phone, and you then turn it on or disable flight mode, your phone will likely use shore signals instead, providing that your cell phone company has a roaming contract with a local cell-service provider. Keep in mind that international calling from island nations' networks can be rather expensive too.
- Experienced cruisers (wanting to avoid ship's costs) simply ensure that their cell phones are turned off or in flight mode while on-board.

Most ships offer ship-to-shore phone service from your cabin, but again at rather expensive rates. They may also levy heavy tolls on people at home who call you by phone on the ship.

Internet on-board

On-board Internet cafés and Wi-Fi hotspots are increasingly common, but the rates also tend to be fairly steep and the speeds (usually relying on high-latency satellite links shared with ship's business) can be unimpressive, though that is improving on some lines.

- All usage will involve a fee, unless it's been paid-for in-advance as a kind of perk. If not, you may well want to buy a block of minutes (also linked to megabytes of usage), at a lower per-minute rate, early in your cruise. You'll have two basic ways of using Internet: at the "Internet Café" on desktop PCs (that can print essential papers, e.g., flight boarding passes at a small fee per page), or through your laptop/tablet.
- If offered in your cabin, WiFi signal strength should be decent and dependable, but check it first on your device. Coverage elsewhere may vary wildly: most of the ship is constructed of steel — an unfriendly material for dependable wireless connections.
- As with "calling" above, you may be able to use the local, on-shore cell phone/WiFi network for logging-in when the ship is docked or anchored very near a populated coast. This will be cheaper and likely faster than what the ship provides, but probably much slower and definitely more expensive than at home.
- 'Avoid depending on a ship's Internet service to download major files of any kind, e.g., video clips, security/software updates. Networked, real time gaming will be frustrating and expensive. On-board, consider limiting yourself to e-mail, unless cost is no object. If using faster services ashore (and promptly back home), you might turn your automatic updates back on.
- If you can, avoid depending on the day before disembarkation to conduct essential business. It's usually the busiest day for on-board internet use, with unusually slow response because so many passengers are checking flight details/getting boarding passes, using up surplus pre-purchased time, and doing other tasks, all while ship's business is especially intense. PCs in the Internet Café will be equally busy.

Internet ashore

If you find these cautions worrisome, you can usually find Internet cafés and WiFi nets at or near many ports, often offering much better rates and speed. You'll often find nets in modern cruise terminals: look for ship's staff. Also look for them for objective advice — they use other port cafés as well.

Anytime you use any computer while traveling, ensure that all private or sensitive portions of your sessions and data are secure, e.g., avoid doing financial or highly-personal business, use your own laptop if possible, have pro-active security capabilities installed and running, use wired Ethernet instead of WiFi if possible, set up a unique and complex password just for the trip, look for the https in networked sessions any time privacy or security is needed. See more discussion at [Internet access](#).

Cope

Look for **laundry rooms** in ship descriptions—*not all ships have them*. If laundry rooms are available, each will have two or more pairs of washers/dryers, detergent and softener dispensers (all usually taking coins/tokens, obtained at the Purser's desk, or perhaps from a coin machine in the laundry room), and irons and ironing boards. A large ship may have a laundry room on each deck where cabins are located.



Bathing in hot springs on [Deception Island](#) as part of an Antarctic cruise

If you'll be cruising for more than a week or so, on a ship without self-serve laundry facilities, you may have to pack substantially more clothes. All ships offer laundry services, but they're quite pricey. Some folks bring detergent (e.g., Woolite) to hand-wash select items in their cabin, though humidity creates extended drying times.

Go next

This is a recap of a typical disembarkation process. Near the end of each cruise segment (not necessarily when you'll finally disembark), the Cruise Director will give a briefing that covers specific details for that ship/cruise and debarkation port, to include likely local customs and immigration (C&I) processing. His/her comments will also cover those staying aboard for the next segment.

Final processing to leave the ship is called "debarkation" or "disembarkation". This involves getting perhaps a few thousand passengers off the ship as efficiently as possible. *You can't all leave at once.* So you'll likely receive a questionnaire several days before the cruise segment end, asking what travel arrangements (if any) you have made to return home. Your answers (e.g., staying aboard, end-of-cruise tour, scheduled flight departure date/time) will determine in what group you will disembark. ("Staying aboard" may still require some form of immigration processing on or off the ship. If so, that will also be arranged and announced.)

- Two or so days before your final cruise end, you'll receive luggage tags indicating your debarkation group. Instructions that come with them will indicate the time your group is *scheduled* to be called to leave the ship.
 - If your group's scheduled debarkation provides too little time to *comfortably* reach a necessary place ashore in plenty of time (e.g., your airline's check-in counter), notify the Pursor's Office/customer service immediately.
- On most ships, those tags will be colored and/or numbered. You can obtain more from the pursor/customer service desk if needed.
- On the last night, place a tag on a fixed handle of *each piece* of your luggage and put at least your large, packed luggage outside your cabin door—usually by 10 or 11PM. It will be taken by stewards that night for you to claim ashore in the terminal the next morning.
 - Unlike airlines, you can put out two or more pieces per person. If you're flying home, you'll need a way to deal with all pieces somewhere ashore before check-in for your flight.
- You can also put out **carry-on bags**, but:
 - Don't pack in them what you'll need in the morning, e.g., keep necessary toiletries/other liquids, *something to wear* to leave the ship. If you'll be flying home, you'll need to later transfer some items (e.g., liquids you've kept for morning use) into your to-be-checked luggage before you approach the airline counter for a flight.
 - Always keep with you any bags that have medications, valuables and valuable papers inside.
 - Do not re-lock the room safe after you take out belongings for the last time. If you do, the next occupants of your cabin will have to ask a very-busy technician to open it, often with a considerable wait.

Some ships offer a "**walk off**" or "**express**" **disembarkation** option. On the questionnaire, you can choose to leave the ship early as part of such a group receiving *special, expedited C&I processing* if you carry off all your possessions. If you opt for it, do **not** miss the call for your group to disembark, or you will be directed to leave in the very last group instead. Everyone in your party should opt for it; otherwise, you'll be processed and outside the terminal perhaps 2-3 hours before the rest reach you.

At some major ports, some ships offer **special luggage handling** services for flying home on certain airlines. For a fee, late the last night, they will take specially-tagged luggage to (perhaps through) your airline check-in at the airport. Before you opt for this, understand the process and your responsibilities, e.g., all belongings you have in-hand to go through pier-side customs, the others as designated elsewhere.

Typically, people opting for express walk-off, those having early flights or cruise-line shore excursions are given the earliest group debarkation times.

Your last morning, you may be instructed to leave your cabin somewhat early (yes, at least one dining room and the buffet will open quite early for breakfast), and proceed to a specific public area on the ship to wait to be called to disembark.

- Consider having a hearty breakfast. You may face several hours before the next opportunity for decent food.
- If anyone in your personal group has a physical limitation affecting debarkation, request help in-advance. He/she may be given permission (and baggage tags) to depart at any time to include members of the family. If he/she needs to be seated while waiting (perhaps 1–2 hours) to disembark, they should go to your assigned public area promptly after breakfast.
- Your waiting area won't necessarily be on the same deck as for exiting the ship. If not, you may have to negotiate stairs with your belongings because elevators will be very busy; those with mobility challenges will have priority.
- In that waiting area, you'll eventually be called by color/number to disembark — usually not before the scheduled time.
 - Many ships do not call groups using the public address system. You may be notified only by staff in your assigned public area.
 - If you're not part of the "express" group that leaves early, and you miss your "regular" group's call, you can usually leave any time later without complications.

As you walk off the ship into the terminal, you'll be ushered to a large area with masses of luggage, considerably less if you disembark in one of the last groups. Your luggage will be arranged according to your disembarkation group. You'll need to pick-out your pieces and proceed to C&I or other processing if any. Porters will likely be available to help. After any processing, many options begin, e.g.,

- If you have an end-of-cruise tour, cruise extension or prepaid airport transfer arranged, you'll be ushered to a bus or other vehicle to transport you, often with your luggage placed on board.
- Other transport can take many forms, e.g., self-arranged taxis, surries to paid parking lots or local hotels.

Once you leave the terminal to travel independently, or after any ship's tour or cruise extension, you basically have full responsibility to reach whatever destination or follow-on transport awaits.

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