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Cruise vs. All-Inclusive Resort: Which Is Best For You?

by TFB EDITORS on JULY 5, 2012



Zoetry Paraiso de la Bonita all-inclusive resort

By Jan Ross

I received an invitation to visit an all-inclusive resort the other day and I carefully saved that email, thinking why, *yes, I would love to visit an all-inclusive resort!* Because they are completely wonderful in every way.

Located in beautiful, tropical locations like Mexico and the Dominican Republic, all-inclusive resorts are often described as a cruise on land, and it has been my experience that they are very much like that. When you think about it, this description is pretty accurate.

So why would you ever want to go on a cruise? Conversely, why would you ever want to go to an all-inclusive resort instead of a cruise? How can you possibly choose? Which is best?

Well, as with any vacation choice, a great deal of the decisions come down to personal choice. But maybe this will help.

The Food

If you're all about the food when you travel, either of these choices are excellent. You are going to find lovely buffets, fast food options, and, at both choices, lovely restaurants that require a reservation.

We recently cruised up the East Coast with [NCL](#) and had some of the best food we have ever tasted. We still talk about the mashed potatoes. I tasted really good sushi for the first time on a [Carnival](#) ship because they all have a free sushi bar!

But we've also stayed at the [Dreams Resort in Puerto Vallarta](#) and we still talk about their homemade coconut ice cream. Why yes, yes we do enjoy food when we travel.

You'll hear people complain about the quality of the food on both cruises and at all-inclusive resorts, but those people have not explored every option because there is wonderful food to be enjoyed with either choice. I judge a tie between the two choices on this one.

Entertainment

There are lots of entertainment choices on a cruise ship and many of them are free. But once you leave the ship, you're going to pay for any sort of shore excursion and it will not be cheap. We really enjoyed the shorter version of "Jersey Boys" on our NCL cruise – so much so that when we were in New York recently, we went to see the show on Broadway.

There will always be lots of entertainment choices at an all-inclusive resort. Many have free shows with local entertainment, such as dancers, singers, or musicians, and there are almost



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Paradisus Punta Cana resort

always free, non-motorized watersports. For example, snorkeling is usually free and the resort provides you with all the equipment you need. At the [Punta Cana Princess](#), for example, you can just pick up your snorkeling equipment and snorkel right off the beach.

Contrast that to how much you would pay for a snorkeling experience on a cruise. Since you can do so much and do it much

more cheaply, the all-inclusive resorts win this one.

Accommodations

At [Zoetry Paraiso de la Bonita](#) in Riviera Maya, we had a huge suite with a private splash pool on our private terrace. On our last cruise with [Disney](#), we also had a huge suite with two bathrooms and a large verandah. But the suite at the all-inclusive resort was much less expensive. It makes sense. The ships only have so much room. The all-inclusive resorts can spread out over acres of beautifully landscaped land. If the accommodations are important to you, an all-inclusive resort can offer more. The resorts win this category.

Room to Move

Some of the new cruise ships are absolutely huge – cities on the water. In fact, the *Allure of the Seas* from [Royal Caribbean](#) is the largest cruise ship in the world. But there's still no way it or any other cruise ship can compare to the size of some of the all-inclusive resorts.

When we stayed at the [Paradisus Punta Cana](#), we had to ride trams all over the place because it covered miles and miles of land. There's usually plenty of room to stroll around on a cruise ship but, at some point, you reach that deck railing and the stroll is over. All-inclusive resorts definitely win this one as they have room to spare.



Overlooking the high seas at sunset...

Health

There have been several recent cases of sicknesses aboard cruise ships so the cruise lines are spending tons of money disinfecting ships after the passengers disembark.

But all-inclusive resorts are not without their problems as well. After staying at a resort and accidentally ingesting some tap water, I had the worst bacterial stomach ailment I have ever experienced. Yet I also got a bad cold on a cruise once.

So, basically, there are germs everywhere. Wash your hands often and be wary of buffets that have been set up for a while. This one is a draw.

Cost

Cruise lines and all-inclusive resorts are in the business of filling up their rooms so their guests will spend even more money on the ship or at the property, so they both have some incredible deals, especially if you can travel at the last minute. Since you can get such great deals with either choice, this one is a draw as well.

Travel

On a cruise ship, you can see the world. Literally. There are cruise ships that travel the globe. We've been on cruises to the Caribbean, Mexico, Bermuda, Alaska, the Eastern coast of the United States, Canada and Europe and only unpacked once. When you visit an all-inclusive resort in one country, that's it – you are only going to see one country. On the other

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hand, you can really spend time seeing the country you are visiting instead of disembarking and embarking in the space of a few hours. There is no winner here – it just depends on what sort of travel you want to do.

That's really what it comes down to – what sort of travel you want. In these *highly official findings*, it appears that the all-inclusive resorts come out slightly ahead. But you might have your heart set on sailing the high seas. If that's true, a cruise is the perfect vacation for you.

So whether you want a cruise on the sea or a “cruise on land” – have fun. And have some of those great mashed potatoes for me? Or maybe the coconut ice cream...

Have you done both – a cruise and an all-inclusive resort? Which did you prefer and why? Tell us in the Comments section!

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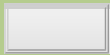
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