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## How To Cruise As Frugally As Possible

by TFB EDITORS on JUNE 21, 2012

By Jan Ross

Years and years ago, cruising was only for the rich and famous. Sumptuously furnished ocean liners traversed the oceans of the world and gorgeously dressed, wealthy individuals sipped champagne and mulled over how best to spend their millions.

Not so much anymore.

Anyone can cruise now and thousands of people are traversing those same oceans, swilling tropical drinks with little umbrellas in them and trying to forget that they have to go right back to work when they get home.

Cruising is for singles looking to meet their future life partners, newlyweds, families with babies or teenagers, and it's also just perfect for Baby Boomers. But cruising is expensive – right?

*Wrong.*

There are great deals to be had for cruises going pretty much anywhere you want to visit. And the advantages to cruising are many, including the fact that one price covers your entire trip and you only have to unpack one time.



This is a good time to use a travel agent as they will know about the best possible deals and might also get you extra amenities at no extra charge, such as a bottle of wine in your room. And surely by now everyone knows that you don't pay the travel agent anything. They make their money from the cruise lines. There are a few agencies out there that are starting to charge for their services, but just avoid them. There are many more that don't charge a dime. There are also agencies that *specialize* in cruise travel. These are the best places to start your planning.

You can also get pretty much the same price by dealing directly with the cruise lines if you would prefer to go that way. And you can get an even better deal if you are a repeat customer with the same cruise line, so it's to your advantage to find a cruise line you like and stick with it.

So, now you've chosen your cruise, you have the best possible price, and your trip is booked. That should be all the money you have to spend unless you just have to bring back a souvenir. But the cruise lines hate to even think that you might not spend more money while you're traveling with them. One of the main reasons you can book a trip so cheaply is that the cruise lines know you'll spend plenty more money with them.

**But you don't have to. Here's how:**

1. **Don't get an expensive stateroom.** We've stayed in fancy suites, staterooms with a verandah, and inside staterooms. But here's the thing: You get the same experience in any stateroom on the ship — same food, same pool, same everything. There are some extra amenities associated with suites, such as free laundry, but you can easily do without them in order to save money. On the other hand, we will pay more to get a verandah because we've discovered that we love



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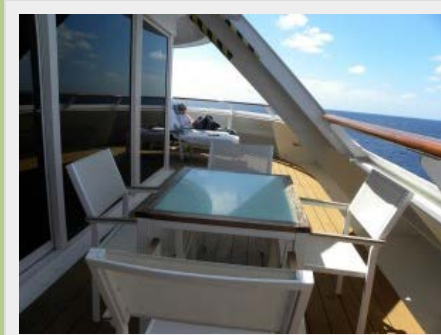
the extra room and being able to enjoy the scenery. You are going to be in that stateroom for a week or more. Choose what is going to make you comfortable.



An Orion Expedition stateroom

2. **Don't pay to eat.** All the cruise lines now have restaurants on board where you have to pay for your meal. They are a little fancier, you have to make a reservation, and perhaps the food is a little better. *Don't do it.* With all the free food choices on board any cruise ship, you are going to find something you like, I guarantee.

3. **Don't pay for shore excursions.** One of the most expensive things on the ship will be the cruise line's shore excursions that you don't have to do. If you must pay for tours, snorkeling trips, etc., book them on your own. They will be much cheaper. Just make sure you plan carefully and get back to the ship in plenty of time because they sure won't wait for you. Another option is just to enjoy the location by leisurely walking around, which is completely free.



Having a veranda is a nice plus.

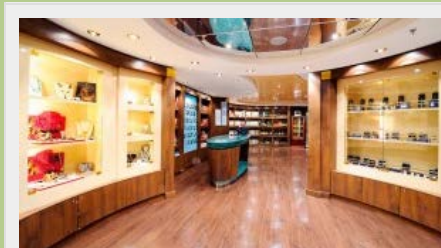
4. **Don't pay for drinks.** My husband and I can easily go a week without any liquor, but if you can't, you are going to pay a lot for those drinks. You can buy bottles of liquor onboard and in many of the ports, but they will take them from you, pack them away, and give them back to you when you disembark. So forget about making your own drinks. It might be possible to bring your own liquor onboard in your suitcase, but they will scan your suitcase and confiscate any liquor. So that's not really a good idea.

5. **Don't pay for wine.** Most cruise lines will allow you to bring wine or champagne onboard and only charge a "corking fee" when you drink it with meals. That fee is much less than you would pay for a bottle of wine on the ship – and your wine will probably be much better than what they have to offer onboard.

6. **Don't pay for non-alcoholic drinks.** We usually just switch over to iced tea while onboard since it's free and cruise lines charge for soft drinks. But if you can't do without sodas for a week, most cruise lines have special deals where you pay a set amount and you can drink as many soft drinks as you can consume in a week. It's a whole lot cheaper than paying per drink.

7. **Don't pay for spa experiences.** You can charge a captive audience whatever you want and a cruise ship is no exception. Massages, facials, mani/pedis, wraps – all are exorbitantly overpriced on a cruise ship. However, they often offer great specials when the ship is in port or later in the week, so be alert and you can get a great deal. The offers will be in the cruise newsletter or in the form of handouts, so watch for those.

8. **Don't shop on board.** Again with the captive audience idea. If you just have to buy a candy bar or need some aspirin, be prepared to pay a lot more than you would on land. And this is not the place to buy gifts to take home. If you wait until later in the week, however, the shops will have sales and that's when you want to buy. Many of the cruise lines also have special sales, such as everything for \$10. I've bought some great pashminas, jewelry, etc., during these sales.



Shops onboard cruise ships -- avoid them!

9. **Don't include airfare with your cruise fare.** When we first started cruising years ago, the cruise lines had great deals on airfare. It was much cheaper to just package up your trip than to try to find a deal on your own. *That is no longer the case*, so never package your trip. Arrange your own airfare. And don't ever pay a travel agent to do this (that is actually one of the things they charge for.) It's way too easy to make your own arrangements online.

10. **Don't pay to cruise in the high season.** If you can possibly arrange your travel for the "shoulder season" – the period between the low and high seasons – you're going to get a much better deal. Alaska in September is still beautiful.

11. **Don't pay for transfers.** The cruise line will transport you from the airport to the ship, but it probably won't be cheap. Not only that, you are at the mercy of everyone else on the bus and you may have to wait for other flights to

arrive. Just check into making your own way to the dock and you will probably find it's cheaper and much more relaxing to go on your own.

12. **Don't pay for photos.** You might want to buy one of the ship's photos if it's an especially great shot of your family, but those photos get expensive. And do you really need them all? Probably not. Bring your own camera, take your own pictures, save a lot of money.
13. **Don't pay for the Internet.** I'm giving you this good advice, even though I don't take it myself because we have to stay connected. Internet on a cruise ship is horribly expensive and usually not that great. There are often Internet cafes in many of the ports, so you can still stay in touch.
14. **Don't go to the casino.** This is not a problem for us since we couldn't possibly care less about gambling. But if you do go to the casino, set some limits for yourself. And put your winnings (if there are any) in your pocket and hang onto them!
15. **Don't pay to have clothes laundered.** If it's something you absolutely must wear, just rinse it out in the sink yourself and hang it on the clothes line in the shower. If it's something that has to be specially laundered or dry cleaned, you shouldn't have packed it anyway.
16. **Don't pay for medicine.** Cold medicine, seasickness medicine, band aids, etc., should all be in a little first aid kit you've packed in your suitcase. If not, you're going to pay a great deal for them on the ship.
17. **DO pay for travel insurance.** Even if you've planned the most economical cruise vacation in the history of man, if you have to cancel at the last minute because of an emergency, it's still money down the drain. Travel insurance is inexpensive compared to the cost of your trip, so spring for it.



**Remember:** The cruise lines are in the business of making money and they will try to get you to spend as much as they possibly can while you are onboard. On the other hand, they also have hundreds and hundreds of staterooms to fill, so that puts the balance of power in your hands when it comes to booking your cruise.

Just be smart when you're booking your cruise and enjoying your vacation and you can have a pretty fabulous trip for a very reasonable amount of money.

**What are your best ideas for saving money on a cruise? Or perhaps you disagree with some of Jan's? Let us know in the Comments section.**

{ 2 comments... read them below or [add one](#) }

**Jane** June 21, 2012 at 7:54 am



WOW...you have so many negatives which is good for a no-frills cruise. On Holland American, you can bring all the wine you want whether it is during embarkation, or during a stop at a port. We also bring with us soda, water, cheese and crackers. Celebrity allows 2 bottles of wine per stateroom at the beginning of the cruise. I believe with the other cruise lines you can not bring anything wine unless you smuggle it in your luggage. All cruise lines allow you to bring water and soda. We ask our room steward to clear out our refrigerator so we could put our things in the fridge.

Laundry – it depends. On a longer cruise (I'm taking a 2 week cruise in the winter) I will do the laundry service since it will be less money than packing an extra suitcase particularly. I am doing a pre and post cruise on my own and don't want to be carrying a lot of luggage.

If you go to Cruise Critic and sign on to their Roll Call for your ship and sailing, you'll find other like minded cruisers. We tend to book our own excursions and open them up to members on the Roll Call. You'll find experienced cruisers who have been to many of these ports before and know some of the tour operators. We saved money but more importantly we had much smaller tour groups.

On Holland American, they usually have a Happy Hour right after sailing in several of the bars. Buy one drink and get the second for \$1; this usually lasts for about an hour. On Celebrity, any points you earn playing in the casino can be converted into free bottles of wine.

Travel Insurance – don't mind the ship's. Go to <http://www.insuremytrip.com> and look at all the different types of insurance. I like to purchase one that pays primary. Some are good for pre-existing but most important, if you have a pre-existing, you need to purchase your insurance within 21 days to get the cheapest rate and at that point, I believe,

all if not most, insurance companies cover pre-existing.

For transfers, when I arrive at a US port, I go to the ground transportation area and look for others and ask if they are going to the port. We'll end up sharing a cab. My daughter and I did that with a family of 3. We got a van and it cost us \$5 each! Quite a savings.

REPLY

**TFB Editors** June 21, 2012 at 8:03 am



Thanks so much for taking the time to share all this great information with us, Jane!

REPLY

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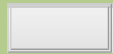
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