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CRUISE

Posted by: [Jan Ross](#)

Wednesday, April 8, 2015



Beautiful sunset on a cruise.

Many years ago, cruising was only for the rich and famous. Sumptuously furnished ocean liners traversed the oceans of the world while gorgeously dressed, wealthy individuals sipped champagne and mulled over how best to spend their millions. This is definitely not the case any longer.

Pretty much anyone can cruise now – today, thousands of people are traversing those

same oceans, swilling tropical drinks with a little umbrella in it 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 pretty darn expensive – right?

Wrong.

There are great deals to be had for cruises going to nearly any destination and the advantages to cruising are many, including the fact that one price covers your entire trip and you only have to unpack once.

Booking a cruise 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 waiting for you in your room. There are plenty of agencies that specialize in cruise travel and 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. You can also get a better deal if you are a repeat customer with the



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same cruise line, so finding a cruise line you like and sticking with them can be advantageous.

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

Here's how not to.

- 1. **Don't get an expensive stateroom.** We've had our share of stays in fancy suites and you get pretty much 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. You are going to be in that stateroom for a week or more – choose what is going to make your time as comfortable and affordable as possible.
- 2. **Don't pay to eat.** All the cruise lines now have onboard restaurants where you pay for your meal. They are a little fancier, require a reservation, and the food may be a little better than elsewhere on the ship. 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 it.
- 3. **Don't pay for shore excursions.** One of the most expensive things on the ship will be the shore excursions. If you must pay for tours, snorkeling trips, etc., simply booking them on your own 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.
- 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 on board. You can buy bottles of liquor in many of the ports, but the cruise ship will take them from you, pack them away, and give them back to you when you disembark, so attempting to make your own drinks is ill advised. It might be possible to bring your own liquor on board in your suitcase, but they will scan your suitcase and confiscate any liquor they find, so that may not be a good idea either.
- 5. **Don't pay for wine.** Most cruise lines will allow you to bring wine or champagne on board 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 on board.
- 6. **Don't pay for non-alcoholic drinks.** We usually just switch over to iced tea while on board since it's free. Cruise lines charge for soft drinks, but if you can't do without them for a week, most cruise lines have special "all you can drink" deals at a set amount. It's a whole lot cheaper than paying per drink.
- 7. **Don't pay for spa experiences.** You can pretty much 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 during your stay, so be alert and you can get a great deal. Watch for offers in cruise newsletters or handouts.
- 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. This is not the place to buy gifts to take home either. However, if you wait until later in the week, the shops will have sales – that's when you want to buy. Many of the cruise lines also have special sales, such as everything for \$10. I have bought some great pashminas, jewelry, etc. at similar sales.
- 9. **Don't include airfare in your cruise fare.** When we first started cruising years ago,



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cruise lines had great deals on airfare. It was much cheaper to package 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 – it's way too easy to make 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 are 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, but you are the mercy of everyone else on the bus and may have to wait for other flights to arrive. You will probably find it's cheaper and much more relaxing to make your own way to the dock.
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 you probably won't need them all. Bring your own camera, take your own pictures, save a lot of money!
13. **Don't pay for Internet.** If you can afford to stay disconnected, do so – 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 find ways to stay in touch.
14. **Don't go to the casino.** We couldn't care less about gambling, but if you do go to the casino, be sure 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 probably shouldn't pack it!
16. **Don't pay for medicine.** Cold medicine, seasickness medicine, Band-Aids, etc. should all be in a little first aid kit you have packed in your suitcase. If not, you are going to pay a great deal for them on the ship.
17. **But DO pay for travel insurance!** Even if you have planned the most economic cruise vacation in the history of man, cancelling at the last minute because of an emergency is still money down the drain. Travel insurance is inexpensive compared to the cost of your trip, so spring for it.



Glaciers in Alaska from a cruise ship.



S.S. Legacy cruise ship.

Remember that cruise lines are in the business of making money and will try to get you to spend as much as they can while you are aboard. However, they also have hundreds and hundreds of staterooms to fill, so that puts the balance of spending power in your hands

when it comes to selecting your cruise. Just be smart when booking and enjoying your vacation and you can enjoy a fantastic trip at a very reasonable cost.

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For twenty years, I worked as a librarian in an elementary school but finally decided to get serious about travel writing and devote all my time to it. Now, I travel the world and write all about it. I can't imagine a more fabulous or fulfilling job. I write a regular travel column for two regional, Central Kentucky magazines and contribute regularly to other magazines and online travel sites, such as The SavvyGal, A Luxury Travel Blog and

The Vacation Gals. I'm an avid reader and stay active with Yoga, Pilates and Zumba classes. My favorite place in the whole world is a beach - any beach. I have been married for 34 years and my husband is my favorite travel companion. I also rely on him for his excellent photography skills. We have two grown children and the best grandson in the world. Slowly but surely, we are visiting all the places we have dreamed about. Hopefully, the next one will be the one you want to read about!

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