

First Time Cruiser Tips



Timothy Joseph - January 2012

Did you know that only 20% of North Americans are cruisers? This article is intended to help the many new cruisers out there. If you are planning your first cruise welcome to the club. Like so many others, you will see why this is a favored way to travel for those who have in the past.

Use a Travel Agent. I am not just saying this because I am a Travel Agent. There are so many aspects of the cruise vacation that you may not be aware of and it is our role to advise you during the whole process.

Book at least six months in advance. This will ensure the rate and options you desire. Cruise lines want to make sure that all of their departures are full and they are not scrambling at the last minute to fill their cabins, for this reason you will get the best deal six months or more from the time of sailing.

Plan ahead. Your planning is not finished when you make your deposit. Remember your ship is leaving on time whether you are there or not, and you want to be there at least two hours prior to departure. If you are more than a 90 minute drive from the port, consider staying the night before in a hotel close to the ship. In addition to saving you the headache and worries that go along with trying to get to the port on time, most cruises leave from cities like Miami, New York and New Orleans where there are many attractions.

Make sure to tell your Travel Agent about any special needs that you may have such as dietary or medical requirements so they can make the proper arrangements for you. Maybe you have medications which require refrigeration or you use a CPAP machine, the ship will need to make special accommodations for you and need to know in most cases at least 30 days prior to travel.

Book your excursions and make reservations for any premium restaurants. The more popular excursions sell out quickly, so if you find one that you definitely want to do, book it. Premium restaurants on board typically require reservations and if you do not make your reservation before boarding, you may miss out on experiencing that restaurant.

Check in online. Like your flight, you can check in to the cruise at the cruises website. This will allow you to board quicker and with more convenience.

Pack a carry on. Your suitcases will be checked and delivered to your room about 1-2 hours after boarding, so bring all essentials with you on a separate carry on. In the carry on you may also want to include one spare change of clothes just in case.

Review the itinerary. There will be an itinerary, usually in a newsletter format, when you get to your room. Look through it and decide what activities you want to participate in. Get out as soon as possible to explore the ship. The cruise ships are moving resorts, there is shopping, dining, gambling and many other activities. To get the most out of your vacation, you will want to know where everything is located.

Be ready for the safety demonstration. There is a safety demonstration which is mandatory. The quicker everyone arrives, the quicker it is over and you can start your cruise.

Start planning your next cruise. What? If you are enjoying your cruise, you can book your next one on board before you leave the ship. Why do this? Incentives! You get discounts, upgrades, on board credits and much more. Can't decide on which cruise to take next? Do an open booking. On most cruise ships they will take a \$100 deposit for your next cruise which will be applied to the fare and you can still partake on the amenities offered.

Finally, when you get home; follow up with your Travel Agent. Let them know what you liked about the cruise and what you would do differently next time. This helps us to find you the best vacation the next time you are ready to book.

Now get out there and cruise!

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