

Information for First Time Cruisers



Considering a cruise for the first time? You're in good company! Research shows Caribbean, Alaska, Mexico, & Mediterranean cruising ranked in the top 10 of various destination surveys.

Cruising is one of the best valued vacations you can take. With a variety of ship sizes available, and over 1800 ports to visit, there really is a cruise to meet all tastes and styles. Cruising is a great family vacation, a romantic escape, or a perfect venue for reunions, meetings, or other groups.

Planning and booking a cruise may seem overwhelming because of the huge number of choices available, but it doesn't need to be. Use these tips and your AAA Travel Specialist to make it smooth and seamless.

AAA Travel Specialists have been on thousands of cruises! Let them use their experience & expertise to find the best cruise for you at the right price.

Visit your AAA Travel Center or call 888-320-3163 to start planning your dream vacation today!

What is included in my cruise ticket?

Cruise pricing includes the stateroom, dining, activities, and entertainment. There are additional charges for on-board shop purchases, casino bets, spa treatments, laundry services, shore excursions, alcoholic beverages and soft drinks, and gratuities.

What identification do I need to bring?

US and Canadian citizens need proof of citizenship (passport, or birth certificate with photo ID). Beginning in June 2009 a passport will be required. Non-US citizens need a valid passport and unexpired US Multiple Re-Entry visa.

It's a good idea to have a passport anyway for all international sailings. If you have an emergency and need to fly home you will need your passport to re-enter the US.

You will not be allowed to board the ship without the proper ID. If you are asked to surrender your passport at embarkation be sure to ask for a receipt. It will be returned to you the morning of arrival back in the US.

What do I wear?

Attire is casual during the day: bathing suit, shorts, t-shirts, jeans, sweatshirts, sandals/flip-flops, and such.

Your daily ship newsletter will tell you each evening's dinner dress code. "Casual" means comfortable, relaxed clothing, but not t-shirts, shorts, or jeans. Golf shirts and casual pants or skirts are acceptable. "Informal" means business casual such as khaki pants, button-down shirts, casual dresses, and pants suits. "Formal" means evening gowns or cocktail dresses, and tuxedos or suits.

How do I pay for things while on-board?

Most cruise lines issue a "cruise card" that serves as ID, stateroom key, and credit card while sailing.

On the last night of the cruise you will receive a statement for the cruise card. Look over this statement carefully. If you see any charges that you feel are in error you must bring them to the attention of the purser's desk right away. If you agree with all of the expenses on the statement and the ship has your credit card on file for the cruise card, your credit card will automatically be charged the amount due. If you are paying in cash, the account must be settled at the end of the trip at the purser's desk.

Casino and medical charges must be paid in cash, and most ships also accept major credit cards.

Can I smoke on the ship?

If you are not on a non-smoking ship then there are usually designated smoking areas. Smoking is not permitted in food service areas, show lounges, or restaurants.

Can I bring liquor on board?

Check with your travel agent because different cruise lines have different policies on liquor. In general, if you are celebrating a special occasion you may bring a fine wine or champagne on the ship during embarkation and must pay a \$10 - \$15 per bottle corkage fee. If you purchase liquor in the ship gift shop or at a port it will be retained by the cruise line until the end of the cruise.

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Will I get seasick?

Many ships are so large and have excellent stabilizers that you will probably not feel the movement. If you do feel queasy you can take over-the-counter anti-nausea medication like Dramamine or Bonine, or you can ask your doctor ahead of time for a prescription patch. Some natural remedies include ginger capsules or acupuncture wristbands, available at AAA.

How will I know what's going on in the "outside world"?

Most cruise lines have 24 hour news stations available on the stateroom TVs. Some sell major newspapers aboard the ship. You can also make phone calls and check email while at sea or on port (for a fee).

How early should I plan to arrive for embarkation?

If you are flying in, plan to arrive before noon – or the night before is even better – to factor in plane delays.

What if my plane is delayed?

Let the airline customer service agent know that you are a cruise passenger so they can try to get you on another flight. Call the cruise line's toll free number to let them know you have a delay. Worst case scenario you will have to arrange to fly to the next port and meet the ship at your expense.

Another good option is to purchase Trip Assist Travel Insurance through AAA, which has Travel Delay protection to help cover the costs of accommodations or other expenses if your flight is delayed for 6 hours or longer.

Will I be able to do laundry while I'm sailing?

There is usually laundry and dry-cleaning services available for a fee. Some cruise lines have coin-operated washers and dryers as well.

What do I do first when I get on the ship?

If you have not already booked online ahead of time, book any spa services, shore excursions, and specialty restaurant reservations that you want. The buffet will be open so grab lunch if you are hungry. Walk around the ship and get a feel for the layout of the ship in general and each deck.

Review the ship's daily newsletter to see what activities you want to do.

Shortly before the ship departs there will be a mandatory muster drill. Crew members will go around and check to make sure no one is hiding in their cabin. The drill takes between a half hour and an hour. Then go back up on deck and start your vacation! Watch the ship depart from the port, go for a swim in the pool, or find an activity you enjoy.

What should I put in my carry-on bag?

Your luggage will probably not arrive at your stateroom for hours, so pack in your carry-on everything you need to get you to dinner time: valuables, medications, basic toiletries, bathing suit, change of clothes, sunscreen, sunglasses, camera.

Should I book a shore excursion through the cruise line? Or on my own? Or just explore the port?

The cruise's organized excursions are probably not the cheapest way to go, but you don't have to worry about transportation to and from the excursion, and sometimes meals and/or drinks are included. The big advantage to the cruise excursion is that you will be sure to make it back to the ship in time for departure. If the group is delayed the ship will wait.

Making arrangements with independent operators on your own will usually save you money and may offer activities you'd rather do, but you must be sure to get back to the ship in time to depart or you will have to meet the ship at the next port at your own expense.

You don't have to do a shore excursion. Many people enjoy just exploring the port independently – shopping, laying on the beach, finding museums, etc. Another good option, of course, is to stay on the ship at port when the pools are quieter, the restaurants are less crowded, and the spa services are usually discounted.

I'm pregnant and would like to do a last vacation before the baby arrives. Is a cruise a good idea?

It depends on the cruise line and how pregnant you will be at the time of sailing. Some cruises will not allow you to sail if you are more than 24 weeks pregnant.

Do I have to eat in the dining room with a bunch of strangers every night?

No, there are usually other places to eat – the buffet, specialty restaurant, pizza place, café, lounge, or room service. Some cruises have open seating, where you can sit wherever you want. More cruise lines are now offering Flexible Dining, Personal Choice, or As You Wish Dining options where passengers may eat at any time.

Don't be afraid of being seated with "strangers", however. When you are at a table with the same people every night, you usually have fun getting to know them as the trip progresses and you may end up with some new friends!