



# WISH I HAD KNOWN...

Comments collected by DarryDFL & PegEggFL  
for members & our friends.

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- ★ [Alcohol](#)
- ★ [Aqua Shoes](#)
- ★ [Arrival at Port](#)
- ★ [Attitude](#)
- ★ [Bill \(Onboard Charges\)](#)
- ★ [Boarding Ship](#)
- ★ [Cabin](#)
- ★ [Cabin Steward](#)
- ★ [Camera](#)
- ★ [Cash \(Money\)](#)
- ★ [Casino/Gambling](#)
- ★ [Cell Phone](#)
- ★ [Clock](#)
- ★ [Clothes](#)
- ★ [Comment Cards](#)
- ★ [Contract](#)
- ★ [Cooler](#)
- ★ [Credit/Debit Card](#)
- ★ [Crew](#)
- ★ [CruiseCritic](#)
- ★ [Currency](#)
- ★ [Customs](#)
- ★ [Diabetic Aid](#)
- ★ [Dining](#)
- ★ [Discounts](#)
- ★ [Documents](#)
- ★ [Door Decorating](#)
- ★ [Dunn's River Falls](#)
- ★ [Elevators](#)
- ★ [End of Cruise](#)
- ★ [Essentials](#)
- ★ [Events](#)
- ★ [Excursion \(Tours\)](#)
- ★ [Exercise](#)
- ★ [First Aid Kit](#)
- ★ [First Day on Ship](#)
- ★ [Formal Nights](#)
- ★ [Hangers](#)
- ★ [Highlighter](#)
- ★ [Honeymooners](#)
- ★ [Insurance](#)
- ★ [Internet](#)
- ★ [Iron](#)
- ★ [Kid's Program](#)
- ★ [Laundry](#)
- ★ [Luggage](#)
- ★ [Map of Home](#)
- ★ [Map of Ship](#)
- ★ [Medicine](#)
- ★ [Mementos](#)
- ★ [Memories](#)
- ★ [Money](#)
- ★ [Must Have Items](#)
- ★ [Name Tags](#)
- ★ [Note Clips](#)
- ★ [Packing Checklist](#)
- ★ [Pesos Required?](#)
- ★ [Phone \(Cell Phone\)](#)
- ★ [Photography](#)
- ★ [Photos](#)
- ★ [Plane vs Ship](#)
- ★ [Pool & Hot Tub](#)
- ★ [Port Canaveral](#)
- ★ [Ports](#)
- ★ [Postcards](#)
- ★ [Pregnancy](#)
- ★ [Onboard Charges](#)
- ★ [Refrigerator](#)
- ★ [Rituals](#)
- ★ [Room Service](#)
- ★ [Sales](#)
- ★ [Ship vs Plane](#)
- ★ [Ship's Map](#)
- ★ [Ship's News](#)
- ★ [Ships](#)
- ★ [Shoe Organizer](#)
- ★ [Shoes](#)
- ★ [Soda](#)
- ★ [Solo Traveler](#)
- ★ [Sun Screen](#)
- ★ [Sports Tape](#)
- ★ [Sunglasses](#)
- ★ [Tips](#)
- ★ [To Do](#)
- ★ [Top 5 Tips](#)
- ★ [Tours](#)
- ★ [Towels](#)
- ★ [TV](#)
- ★ [Visitors/Company](#)
- ★ [Water](#)
- ★ [Websites](#)

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## ALCOHOL

- FredR: Alcohol is so expensive. Watch it.
- CruzinForever: Take wine to drink in your cabin. You can bring 2 bottles of wine onboard at every stop; but, *only on some ships*. Average mixed drink costs \$7.50. Beer is \$6.
- BJS323X: Bring mini bottles of champagne (found in 4 packs at the liquor store). Then order orange juice from room service. One little bottle makes 2 mimosas!
- DarryDFL: In the Caribbean, any wine you purchase onshore is taken from you as you board & held “for your convenience” until you return to the original port of embarkation.
- MasterBaker: Our bags are always scanned as we re-board after a port day, no matter what cruise line or ship we are sailing. I would expect the wine to be confiscated & returned the last night of the cruise. I wouldn’t expect to be able to enjoy it in my cabin during the cruise.



Policies vary  
by cruise line.  
Check the posts  
for your ship at  
[CruiseCritic.com](http://CruiseCritic.com)

## AQUA SHOES

- DarryDFL: (“Water Shoes”) are required for all Dunn’s River Fall tours in Ocho Rios. They are \$20 on the ship.

## ATTITUDE

- nekhabet: Be extra polite to the natives in port. Remember you represent your country & all tourists to them. In many cases, they are very poor & see you as very wealthy. Try to make at least one local’s day in every port.
- Griffy: Don’t break in line at the buffet.
- Griffy: Don’t knock people down to be first off at the ports.
- ThePatientOne: Smile at all the staff. Even the guys & gals in the semi-dirty coveralls that work deep in the ship. It does make their day..
- ThePatientOne: Keep an open mind while relaxing around the pool. You will see things that you never thought you would see. Above all, relax. Don’t stress, & enjoy *your* vacation.
- Barry Mac: Set your expectations realistically. You heard stories of how magical cruising is or how awful it can be. The reality is it will have a few great

moments, lots of good ones, & a few bad ones. The secret is that this is a vacation & vacations are not about stress. The crew of a cruise ship have one goal in mind: ensure you enjoy yourself. If there is something wrong, tell someone immediately. Someone will try to fix things right away. Do your homework & set a realistic expectation.

- Jkudzu: Do not fear that you won't fit in.
- DukeFamily: There will be far more going on onboard than you can possibly do. You can wear yourself out, not to mention stress yourself out, thinking you have to be everywhere & do everything. Enjoy down time, watch the ships wake, revel in having nothing you must do!
- R&RFraz: Your attitude toward others will have a huge impact on how your cruise goes. I am always sad to see people angry & short tempered, or treating crew members like they are second-class citizens & then complain if they are treated poorly. If you treat people with kindness & respect, you will get great service all the way around. If you experience a problem, don't let it ruin your trip.
- Kant Wait: My top 5 suggestions are:
  - ❶ Go out of your way to be polite, kind & interested in the crew that you interact with.
  - ❷ Be kind & patient with elderly & handicapped people. They aren't there to ruin your vacation or to purposely slow you down or get in your way.
  - ❸ Say hello to other passengers.
  - ❹ Don't be in a hurry.
  - ❺ Book another cruise while on board. It will save you money.
- GrandBistro: There may a couple of rotten eggs. Almost everybody is a nice person & is there to have a good time & is perfectly willing to help ensure that everyone else has a good time, too. Cruising may not be the super-elite & exclusive adventure it once was, & I think that makes it better. Its regular folks, enjoying a holiday, feeling generous but aware of a budget, & expecting to have a good time.
- Mrs. Pete: Discuss your expectations ahead of time with your traveling companions, especially if those companions are children. Be sure that everyone else is on the same page as far as spending, sleeping in vs. seeing the sunset, shore excursions, etc. Its better to hash these things out ahead of time rather than to assume that everyone has the same plans you do.

- Ninayablok: Remember YOU are unique. Take all advice with a salt shaker of salt. “Suck the marrow out of the cruise.” Do something you’ve never done. Be self indulgent. Talk to strangers. Eat dinner on your balcony. Don’t go home thinking “I wish I had done X” Do it.
- idocdlw: If your ship has a Slide, no matter how young or how old (dignified, mature, etc.) you think you are, if you are physically able, go down it at least once. There’s a reason kids coming off the slide have such a big smile on their faces...go get yourself one of those big smiles!
- FredR: A cruise is an adventure unlike any other vacation, so keep cool & cheerful. A smile is truly the international language so do this often on your cruise. Be kind, patient, & gracious with the cruise staff.
- LiveTheatre: Relax. I was so nervous about all the last minute stuff & the what ifs that I was way to stressed leading up to it!
- LiveTheatre: Ask — If you want something ask for it. Everyone really wants to make this a great trip for you.
- nekhabet: Remember vacations are for catching up on life. Have a blast & don’t sweat the small stuff.
- ThePatientOne: Make new friends. We did & are cruising with them in Oct.
- DooAndHerb: Unfortunately, expect rude behavior from your fellow passengers, no matter what cruise lines you are on. Never, retaliate, you are better than them. Be open minded. Have fun.
- Jula: My theory is: life is a karma boomerang — you get back what you throw out there. Be prepared for missed ports & changes in itinerary — being flexible will help your stress levels. The time flies by so quickly. Let the little stuff go.

## **ARRIVAL AT PORT**

- MrsPete: Arrive in your home port city a day ahead of time. It’s the cheapest insurance you can buy, & it will save massive stress.
- Jerry2457: ALWAYS fly in a day before your cruise leaves port. This gives you insurance in case the weather doesn’t cooperate & in most ports, there are plenty of reasonably priced hotels close to the port terminal. Some hotels even offer free shuttles to the terminal but most are a reasonable cab ride.
- PTodd: I agree. Even if you are on a tight budget, there is always a Motel 6 or Super 8 around. If you are flying into a port overseas, you might even

want to consider flying in 2–3 days ahead. On the flip side of this tip, I suggest flying out the day after your ship arrives back. Last year on Jan/3rd, we were going out of Mobile, AL, on the *Carnival Holiday* (now retired) & there was rain & heavy fog. The ship was not allowed into port due to poor visibility. When it finally docked, the passengers did not disembark until 4 p.m. We didn't get embark until 6 p.m. & couldn't get into our rooms until around 7:30 p.m. Needless to say, I'm sure there were a lot of people that missed their flights. Between weather, traffic accidents & Murphy's Law anything can happen.

## BOARDING SHIP

- ▶ PegEggFL, Dec/19/2009: We arrive at each ship by 11 AM, board quickly & get familiar with its layout. Of course, we make time to enjoy lunch & meet new friends as well as take photographs.
- ▶ RoadTripper: Boarding/checking in is just like at the airport & hotel. Nothing is complicated.
- ▶ Barry Mac: As soon as you board, don't go straight to your cabin. Depending on how early you arrive, you may not be able to go to the cabin anyways as the hotel staff may still be cleaning it. Instead, head to the spa to make any reservations you didn't make online before boarding. Head to the buffet deck for lunch and, about an hour before sailing, head for the open deck to get a good spot for watching your sail away.

## CABIN

- ▶ DarryDFL, Jul/12/2010: We always book an **inside cabin**.

Yes, I know that the thrill of having a balcony and lots of room in a cabin is part of the allure of cruising; but, I suggest you first-time — and even experienced — cruisers consider an inside cabin for several reasons.

First, we were able to take a 7-day cruise on the RCI Legend of the Seas, out of Tampa, in Dec/2009, for \$70-per-day each — including tips & gratuities. Try doing that with a balcony cabin. We're averaging 2 cruises using inside cabins for the cost of one cruise with a balcony.

Second, we spend very limited time in our cabins. Other than to change clothes and sleep, we're out and about all day. Between the pools, libraries,

classes, ports and lounges, there is so much to do, so many people to meet, so many photo opportunities, why would we spend more time in the cabin?

Third, one has to be creative in consolidating packing, using “nested” suitcases; packing your clothes already on hangers so that 2-weeks of clothes can be hanged up in 7 minutes flat; and being creative in how you organize your cabin. (OK, being married to a retired, Army administrative Warrant Officer gives me an edge.)

Finally, having a smaller cabin encourages one to get out more. The result is meeting more people who introduce you to places you haven’t been to — yet; finding out their “secrets” for cruising; and seeing more of the ships that are within themselves an attraction.

All I’m suggesting is that if you are traveling on a budget and want to see those budget dollars stretched beyond your imagination, try an inside cabin.

- Cruise Girl Forever: Put **suitcases under bed**; makes more room in closet.
- R&RFraz: If you have an inside cabin, each night, **tune the TV to the deck camera channel** that feeds live video from up top. This way your room will begin to get light when the sun begins to come up. This helps you start to wake up as if you had a window. It is also fun to see what is happening up top before you get out of bed.
- Kulpn: Inside rooms are A-OK. Unless you love a balcony. We don’t need one. we are NEVER in the room.
- Kulpn: The cruise shampoos work fine; the wind will mess your hair anyways.
- Aruvqan, Nov/14/2009: Power strip is a requirement. There is very limited power points/outlets available, so if you need to charge a camera, & have an alarm clock, & a CPAP/sound generator, & so forth. Most cruise ships do not take into account how “electrified” people have become lately.
- GlendaleCruiser: The curling iron doesn’t work in the bathroom, so someone can plug in a curling iron at the vanity & not worry about unplugging phones or laptops.
- SiagonRon: If you have an outside cabin, use a bungee cord to tie back the balcony door, leaving the cabin open to ocean breezes.
- LiveTheatre: **Get to know your room steward**. You never know when you might need a little something extra!

- T&DCruisers: I brought a couple battery-operated **tealights** with to keep on each night stand. They were invaluable when trying to navigate the way to the bathroom in the interior cabin.
- DarryDFL: Do NOT use candle wick tealights; they are a fire hazard. They are encased in a thin metal or plastic cover, about 38mm diameter by 16mm high, so that the candle can liquefy completely while lit.
- R&RFraz: Get a **night light** for inside cabins, especially if you are traveling with young kids.
- R&RFraz: Consider a clock if you are not a watch person.
- StaceyCT: A “white noise” machine is much smaller than a fan, so easier to pack.
- Estatic Cruiser: A balcony stateroom for anyone is ideal, on a honeymoon, so much sweeter. I’ve cruised the Mediterranean & Caribbean & both areas are perfect to take full advantage of a balcony.
- Smokeyham: If you’ve got an outside balcony, bring three large binder clips. Binder clips are to keep your curtains closed in case they sway with the motion of the ship, so you can sleep in past sunrise.
- bsblindab: Under the bed is storage, not a box-spring. Store your luggage there.
- Calgon1: Inside cabins. The couple staying in the penthouse cabin will be sitting at the same table, eating the same wonderful foods, visiting the same ports of call, & experiencing the same things as you. They’ll just be paying anywhere from 5–15 times what you’ll pay. Another way to look at it is: They’ll take one cruise & for the same cost you’ll be able to take 15 cruises! I’m not the brightest kid on the block, but even I can figure that one out.
- Jerry2457: If you like to see sunshine every day or would enjoy sitting out at night, book a balcony cabin. If you like or want to sleep in & get up whenever you like, an inside cabin will work fine. The TV in your cabin has channels that take shots of the outside area so you can turn it on in the morning & see what the weather is like at any time.
- DarryDFL: Connie brought a blowup pillow. Great idea.
- Jose: We always book an inside cabin, we like the price! And also the dark; we sleep better. Also quieter. We often get up-graded now but still love the cabins on Princess ship on level 5 behind the art gallery. It’s so convenient.

## CABIN STEWARD

- TheGo6Girl: Bring a small gift for your cabin steward from your hometown. I bring a t-shirt, but any souvenir will do. I wrap it in cellophane & add some candy & then put a note on the outside with a quick hello message (basic info about who we are & how excited we are about this cruise). I carry it on board, & put it on the top of the bed as soon as we board.
- Soozles: I disagree. The crew lives in quarters smaller than the inside cabins for the passengers, & they share them with some other person. They don't have room for extra t-shirts or other knickknacks. Of course, they're going to thank you for it; but odds are, it ends up in the trash, because they just don't have the space for it. Can you imagine how stuffed their rooms would be if everyone brought them a shirt or souvenir from their hometown? My tip is, "Money talks." If you liked the service someone gave you, cash is the best gift. Also be sure to fill out your comment cards, the crew gets promotions & raises based on the comments you write.
- R&RFraz: Leave any books or magazines you bring as reading material. We have actually been asked if we could leave our magazines behind when we checked out. The crew shares them. Our last cabin steward told us they have an informal "library" for the crew with all the books & mags. When it starts to fill up, they take the well-read books ashore & donate them to a school/hospital/hotel/etc. So you may want to consider a book if you are feeling like you want to give a gift since it is something all the crew can enjoy & then donate for others to enjoy.
- TravelFreak: Although it was very nice & well-intentioned for the one poster to give a tee shirt to the cabin steward, cash is king. They also like pre-paid phone cards for calling home from ports!

## CAMERA (Also see "[Photography](#)" & "[Photos](#)")

- DooAndHerb: Buy the underwater cameras at your nearest Walmart.
- Barry Mac: A small netbook computer can do multiple duty as a place to download your camera & as a charger for devices that have USB interfaces (e.g. cell phones, GPS units, MP3 players, book readers).
- Barry Mac: Stock up on batteries, memory cards, film, & videotape before sailing. Even if they have those items on board or in port – which isn't guaranteed – you'll pay 3x the cost. If your camera can use rechargeable

batteries, bring a supply of them & a charger. Remember, everything has to go in your luggage & the airlines have gotten mercenary about both how many bags & the weight allowance for each (50 lbs). Don't waste your weight allowance on a ton of batteries if you can help it. Don't forget the chargers for your other electronics as well.

## CASINO

- FredR: Stay out of the casino unless you have lots of money.
- ThePatientOne: We did do pretty good at the casino & payed off our Sail & Sign bill on Saturday so that was a big help. (Cant guarantee you will do good at the casino though.) We came off the ship over \$500 up & only had a \$53 S&S bill — for the charges after the pay-off.
- DarryDFL: A professional gambler shared this with me. He carries a given amount of cash into a casino. As soon as he wins 10% more than that, he leaves. He makes a living gambling because he knows “when to hold them & when to fold em.” He prefers blackjack to slots because the former gives you an edge if you “play smart.”
- 2Dogs: Although permitted, don't use your SeaPass to get money to gamble while drinking.

## CELL PHONE

- RoadTripper: Cell phone clocks — some times work; but, mostly not.
- 2Dogs: One of the top items left behind on a cruise is the cell phone charger cord. Wrap your cell phone charger cord around one of your suitcase handles. You're much less likely to leave your luggage behind.
- 2Dogs: I also read about a guy who uses his cell phone to photograph the business card of the ship that he's on. Thus, if he loses his cell phone while in port, an honest person can more easily figure out how to return it. (A dishonest person isn't interested in your wallpaper any way.)
- Sailor\_JimC: **WARNING:** Using your cell phone at sea (even for calls phone-to-phone on the ship) is expensive. Typically, international roaming rates (which are \$2.75 per minute on Verizon) apply to the call. Text messages are 25 cents a text. If they intend on using their phones on the ship, they need to know this. Your home calling plan is not in affect once we

leave Port Canaveral. Then once in the ports, whatever the local roaming rates are in that country apply. I normally turn my phone off (if you have a “smart phone” make sure it is powered down or it will attempt data calls to check email) & chuck it in the safe until we get back to the US. Unless I need to make a call that warrants the expense.

➤ GlendaleCruiser: I don't use my cell phone or BlackBerry on the trip very much, but I turn them on to check for text messages once-a-day so they need to be charged. I charge everything up on the last night for the cruise.

➤ GlendaleCruiser: I would advise against having an iPhone on while your internet capabilities roam from tower to tower. If you make sure you disable the internet option that might work, but if your iPhone is surfing the net while you are gone, it will cost you thousands \$.

➤ Mikaylas Mom: Oh yes. You must turn off wi-fi on your iPhone, & also put it in airplane mode. Then its just an iTouch.

➤ FintuckyFarms: Do not rely on your cell phone for the time. Sometimes the ship does not change time. “Ship time” will be announced & you need to stay on ship time or you may be late for an excursion or miss the boat!

➤ GoldMoon: Contact AT&T & see if you can add Mexico onto your plan for the month let them know you are going out of the country. That's what I did, but that was a while back, then I cancelled when just before the month was over. I could call home from Mexico & they could call. It was still more expensive than home, but not an-arm-and-a-leg to check home. Although it was a few yrs ago, it only cost like \$4 to add Mexico for the month, & then 29 cents a minute or something like that. Carnival has gone down on their price per minute to use the cell phone. I believe it about \$2.99-a-minute, for cell phone use — not texting which is unreal. And your mom can call the emergency number & get you for \$10-dollars-a-minute, but who really cares as long as you get notified.

➤ Jolimont: If you don't want to roam turn data roaming OFF like this: Settings ➤ General ➤ Network ➤ Data Roaming set to OFF. Data roaming is always off on my iPhone. I don't need to data roam at home (my service provider gives me access to unlimited data) & definitely not while on a ship where its outrageously expensive.

➤ Calgon1: Turn off the cell phone. The same goes for the Internet. Both are very expensive at sea. If You're so vital to your business, friends, etc. that you absolutely, positively, HAVE to stay in touch, then stay home with them &

watch the Travel Channel. The reason You're on vacation is not to work, its to decompress from your normal daily life. So, do it. No matter how important you think you are, the reality is that You're not. If you were to drop dead right now, your business & the rest of the world would keep on spinning. So, turn off the cell phone & don't get on the Internet.

➤ GlendaleCruiser: This is incredibly thoughtless & insulting. Not everyone takes a cell phone because they feel self-important & their only other choice is to stay home. Some people on this board hold "Medical Power of Attorney" on seriously ill family members & have to be able to make a decision of life or death. And there is no one to keep the world spinning if they cant get an answer back within 24 hours. I've said MANY times on here that a text message from each port to say, "We are well. Is everything well there?" cost me about \$12–15 in Europe for 16 days. So consider your audience before you pump up your opinion, & spread it like peanut butter because not everyone in the world is the same.

➤ Sunnieday146: In my humble opinion, this person may just have been trying to be helpful & to strongly suggest that people take a break from work. Some people are practically addicted to their "Crack-Berries" (Blackberries) & it's difficult to get them to turn them off. I'll bet this person knows someone like that. I personally had a couple over for dinner recently, & BOTH of them were checking & sending emails (regarding minor work issues) on their blackberry's while we ate a meal that took me hours to prepare. For my cruise, I'm also going to have to FORCE myself not to go online!!! So I'm guilty too. I can tell you that this week-long cruise will be the ONLY time in years that I won't be online for two days in a row.

➤ CloudShoveller: My Dad has to take a cell phone everywhere he goes as he is on the wait list for a kidney. This will be the 2<sup>nd</sup> transplnt for him & it is getting down to the wire. (His first kidney rejected after 8 years.) A phone call will literally mean life or death. I agree with posters that if you CAN unplug from technology the benefits are amazing though. I live on the internet so to go without is very difficult but I do find after a few days my mind starts to think differently & you experience peace in a way that isn't possible being plugged in. Both ways are fine of course. I highly recommend trying both if you can to compare the difference!

➤ SunnieDay146: Some people are practically addicted to their Blackberries & it's difficult to get them to turn them off. I'll bet this person knows someone

like that. I had a couple over for dinner recently, & BOTH of them were checking & sending emails (regarding minor work issues) on their Blackberry's while we ate a meal that took me hours to prepare. For my cruise, I'm also going to have to force myself not to go online!

➤ Swells1: I knew the time on my cell phone would be off. I chose not to pay attention. I haven't worn a watch in over 10 years! I figured I could calculate the difference in my head. Nobody told me just how "off" my cell would be! I would check once, and it would be an hour ahead, 5 minutes later, it would be 2 hours and 38 minutes behind. DH finally broke down and bought a cheap watch onboard midway through the cruise. This is after he asked some random guy on the street (in Sydney, NS, no less) for the time, and the guy offered him pot. Maybe "Do you have the time?" means something different north of the border?

## CLOCK

➤ KAYEF: I take two pieces of that "no slide" shelf stuff & put a small travel clock on each — one on the bedside table & one in the bathroom. When I get up at night, I know what time it is! The clocks never slide off the shelf. They are 99¢ at IKEA or a dollar store & take one AA battery.

## CLOTHES

➤ CardBucFan: Don't bring so many clothes; nobody cares if you wear the same thing twice.

➤ CruiseGirlForever: Take 2 bathing suits — they don't dry overnight.

➤ CruiseGirlForever: Don't stress about wardrobe; no one cares what you wear.

➤ SimpleLife: Don't be self-conscious about your appearance in bathing suit or shorts. There are all body types aboard in all types of attire. Don't spend a lot of money on new clothes. Bring only things you love & feel good in. Plan your outfits with versatility, multi-use, & easy care.

➤ DireMongoose: Pack a swimsuit & clothes for dinner on the first in your carry-on — that way you can hit the pool right away & don't have to worry about when your luggage arrives in your room.

- StarTraveler: Versatileness works well with clothes. Best purchase ever made were two pair of convertible pants — unzip the legs, & they become shorts for walking around in ports, zip them back on & they're khakis for dinnertime. And depending on how much walking (and how hot it is), I've gotten away with wearing a duo-dry T-shirt while in port, then throwing on a button-down collared shirt on top for dinnertime as well. I've also gotten away with one pair of shoes — black, no-slips that work well in port as well as on formal nights. Just wash any dirt off of them.
- MrsPete: Pack lightly, but do dress appropriately for dinner.
- GlendaleCruiser: Think about "what if?" What if my luggage never arrives & I am left with only my carry-on? Take 1 bathing suit, one formal outfit + shoes, a couple of daytime outfits (suitable to wear to dinner, too) & one pair of your shoes. Also your makeup that is not liquid. Then, if your luggage is lost or late, you will have enough to get by.
- GlendaleCruiser: Consider taking half the clothes & taking the new Purex 3-in-1 strips. They are detergent, fabric softener & dryer sheet in one sheet & will pack so flat its like they aren't there (a few in a zip lock bag). Then you are ready to take your quarters & run a quick load in the washers/dryers on board (\$3 for each washer/dryer).
- LiveTheatre: Take half of what you think you need. Wearing the same outfit to dinner twice is NOT a crime, & no one will even notice!
- nekhabet: Bring fewer clothes. We did a load of laundry on the ship.
- Jkudzu: Bring more casual outfits; don't be stressed.
- BJS323X: Bring a sun hat, but make sure it fits tight or ties on — it can be windy when your ship is moving.
- BJS323X: Bring a backpack to carry stuff in port.
- BJS323X: Bring ear plugs, it helps with blocking out the folks who forget how much voices travel down the hall at 3 AM.
- BJS323X: Buy cheap rain ponchos at the dollar store. Always bring along when in port, even if it is sunny when you leave the ship. The weather can change very quickly especially in the Caribbean.
- Ithaca Gal: Shoes are heavy! You don't need a pair to match every outfit!
- Happy KS: I wish I would have known that people don't wear nice country club casual clothing during the day & that re-wearing the same slacks several nights is not a problem. Cruise ships are filled with average people, many of them dress like they are getting ready to clean out the garage in old T-shirts

& sloppy shorts. I had purchased us all new wardrobes. That, plus the above gadgets we didn't use, could have paid the deposit for the next cruise. Most of the "cruise clothes" made it into the Goodwill bag. I learned to not buy for a cruise; only buy what you will wear at home.

➤ GrandBistro: Fewer clothes, & room for my pillow. I like to have slippers to wear in the room or a quick run to the laundry.

➤ Pamela30FL: I wear tennies very rarely. I brought the tennies to walk around Cozumel but I forgot to bring socks. Poor hubby & I went into EVERY single shop looking for socks. By the time we found them I had horrible blisters from the shoes I had just bought to bring on the cruise.

➤ NMLady: Be aware that not all ships have washer/dryers for passenger use. For example, NCL no longer provides them on any of their ships. We take clothes that are durable enough to be sent to the ships laundry which uses hot water & hot dryers.

➤ DulcimerGirl: Bring along a large trash bag. Put it into your empty suitcase under the bed. Throw dirty/worn clothes into it as soon as they are removed. By the time the cruise is over, almost all your packing is already done. Tie up the laundry bag, & pack the unworn stuff/shoes & extras around it. Done! Also bring a 1 gallon ziploc bag to put undies in, after they've been worn of course, & keep in one of the drawers. Then just zip shut & toss in the suitcase headed for home.

➤ Calgon1: Pack lightly. The old saw about Pack half the clothes & take twice the money is very true! No one is going to care (or even notice) if you wear something more than once, as long as its clean. Travel shoes, dress shoes, sandals. That's it. Everything else should be mix-n-match. Many of the ships have washers & dryers on board. All of them have laundry service. Use it.

➤ HokieFans: Don't take as many clothes as you think you need. I will admit that I took too many. I did well on the formal nights by taking a different blouse for each but wearing the same pants for the three we had. I will probably repeat an outfit in the future. I also took too many tank tops. Since we were on for 16 days, we did a wash; had I really thought it through, I would have cut down on half of those. Besides, then you will have the room for more souvenirs! This will cut down on the jewelry I think I need as well.

## COMMENT CARDS

- GlendaleCruiser: Those comment cards are used for performance appraisals for the crew & they receive merit raises & promotions based on the comments received. Honestly, in addition to your kind words & respect, those are the only two things they want & need from you.
- ErinMarie424: If you plan to leave nice comments on the comment card at the end of the cruise, it's a good idea to jot down the names/jobs of the people rather than wait until the last day. It can be hard to remember the name of the cocktail waiter that brought you your DOD on the first day four (or more) days later. (DBF is very helpful when it comes to remembering the names of the pretty ladies in the gift shop or serving the cocktails.) I just keep a little list going in the cabin & add to it as needed.
- CptSticky: Comment cards are great, but if someone was really great, a letter written to corporate HQ will really get the person rewarded. We had someone get promoted based on a letter we wrote.
- DarryDFL: Carnival Lines has a free drawing for valuable prize of the comment cards that are turned in the last evening. Take notes during the voyage so that filling out the card is that much easier. Remember that unless you give the highest ratings, the jobs of those you evaluate can be affected.

## CONTRACT.

- CheryLandTK: Read your cruise contract, especially the parts about cancellation & port/itinerary changes.

## COOLER.

JoeBat1, Jun 11/2009: If you like really COLD soda, buy a collapsing cooler at "WalleyWorld" or K-Mart & have the room steward keep it filled with ice.

## CREDIT/DEBIT CARD

- FredR: Make sure that you have enough money on your credit card to cover the gratuities automatically. Do not even consider not paying the gratuities.

- Barry Mac: Use 2 credit cards for your cruise: 1 for your shipboard account & a separate 1 for shopping. The reason is authorizations. When you check in, the credit card you use for your onboard account will get an authorization request for about \$200 per day for however long your cruise lasts. This authorization freezes that much of your available credit line so an 8-day cruise has just frozen \$1,600 of your available credit — even if you don't spend a dime. The authorization will expire some time after your cruise has finished & you are home. Oh yeah, remember that hotel room you stayed in the night before sailing? They did the same thing when you checked in. So did that rental car company. Regardless of the actual charges, all those authorizations have sucked up your credit line & you may get that embarrassing "I'm sorry your card was denied" when you try to buy that absolutely darling sapphire & diamond necklace in Grand Cayman.
- Barry Mac: When You're using a credit card in foreign countries you may also get charged a currency conversion fee & a 2–3% processing fee. Check with your card company before leaving as not all cards charge this. Make sure you bring cash with you for incidental expenses & shops that don't take your credit card. MC & Visa are pretty universal but AMEX & Discover are not. Don't put all your money in travelers checks since you'll have to find a bank to cash them in port. What do you do if the banks aren't open or you don't have time before the tour leaves to find a bank? Cabins have safes in them.
- CPTSticky: Well, being a poor grad student, this might not be a option for you, but you can "prepay" your card what you expect to charge on the cruise. That way you will have a larger limit. Or, you can call the card & ask for a limit increase, but in this environment, that might not get you very far. Also, some of the cruises will set up a cash account for you, but I think it has to be paid off by the last day of the cruise.
- NKereina: I asked my travel agent how much Carnival would authorize on my card when I boarded & she told me it would be \$500. My cruise is a 5-day cruise. My limit is \$1000, & I don't mind if the whole limit is consumed as we have cash for spending money. I don't want my card to be declined due to not enough funds for authorization.
- Jebba555: I call my credit card company & tell them Ill be traveling so they don't put a freeze on my card when they see non-traditional charges.
- TexanAtHeart: After reading all the posts about holds being placed on credit cards, I decided to use a debit card. I called RCI to ask how much of a

hold they would put on it. I was told that I would tell them how much I plan on spending & that is what they would hold. If I start to go over the amount, they will notify me & I can either increase it, put down cash, or put the remainder on a credit cards. This was a relief to me as I do not want a large hold on a credit card that I may need for something. I plan on starting with \$700 on the debit & see how far that takes me.

► Holland America: “Our cashless society is designed to make your life on board as simple as possible. When you board the ship, your account has already been activated & you may make purchases by simply showing your guest identification card & signing a receipt. On embarkation day, you will need to register your credit or debit card (Holland America Line Rewards Visa, Visa, MasterCard, American Express, Discover) in order to use your onboard account for shipboard purchases. Your card will be pre-authorized for US\$60 per person for each day for cruises up to 25 days & US\$30 per person per day for cruises longer than 25 days. At the end of your cruise, you will receive a final statement, & your card will be charged only for the actual amount of your purchases. Please inform your credit or debit card issuer in advance that your card will be used on a Holland America Line ship. This will help prevent delays in obtaining pre-authorization on board. Some banks may keep the pre-authorization in place for up to 30 days. If you do not want to use a credit or debit card, the ship will collect a cash deposit from you at time of boarding in the same pre-authorization amount. Any excess deposit will be refunded to you at the end of the cruise. Travelers checks may be cashed at the front office to make your deposit. Personal checks are not accepted on board.”

► NMLady: Yes, the Holland America statement is true. I just finished our online check-in the other day for our May/Alaska cruise & when I registered the credit card I'd be using I also agreed to the \$840 hold (14 days X \$60 per day) that would go into effect upon boarding. Then when I did online check-in for my husband & added him to the credit card the hold became \$1680 for both of us & I agreed to that. It is clearly spelled out when you do online check-in & register a credit card for your shipboard charges. You could choose the option that you'll be doing cash instead, then when you board give the purser a cash amount. When that's spent either add more or quit spending.

That is a hold, not a charge. It doesn't go into effect until embarkation. The only charges will be what we actually charge to our shipboard account

when we are on board. We pay our credit card balance in full every month & our credit card has a high enough limit that freezing \$1680 while were cruising is no problem. The only people who have problems with the amount temporarily frozen are people who don't have a very high credit limit.

➤ SeaRoses: I belong to a Virgin Islands message board where I have seen many posts regarding credit cards not being accepted when a quick call beforehand could have avoided the confusion and, sometimes, disappointment. I've started doing that for 2 cards when I travel out of the country & both companies mention they wish more customers knew to do this. It cant hurt! I also remember a post where a cruiser used her debit card & couldn't get the funds released until some time after she returned home causing her many problems with her bills. The consensus was to not use a debit card for cruising.

➤ Ringram: The amount they reserve is called "Booking." It is done once for the \$200. They do not automatically "book" an additional \$200 each day; only if you've charged \$200. Think of it as them holding an extra \$200 in reserve. I'm not sure at what amount they will "Book" an extra \$200, but if you charge less than \$200, your credit card will not get hit for more than \$400.

➤ DonnaGail221, May/19/2010: "Prepaying" (or overpaying) your card so that you have a "larger limit" most likely does not work. I work in a bank. If someone has a \$1,000 limit & makes a payment so that they have a credit balance, their limit is *NOT* increased. They still only have \$1,000 available for card authorizations. Don't do this without first checking with your credit card issuer. If you don't think you have enough credit available, you can do the "cash" option on your onboard account & pre-pay that; not your credit card.

## CREW

➤ Vampire Pirate: Chat with the crew. Not just your room steward & the waiters, but also any sailors you see working on the ship, engineers, security staff, entertainment officers, cooks/chefs. Most of them are very happy to talk with passengers, & you'll hear some great stories about life on board, life at home, interesting facts about the ship, hints & tips about upcoming ports, & you might just make a new friend or two!

- StarTraveler: By asking our waiter, I found out the “pecking order” of the wait staff: vests were assistant waiters; jackets were waiters; & red jackets were wine stewards.
- LiveTheatre: Get to know your room steward. You never know when you might need a little something extra!
- VaBeachCruisers897: When shopping for Thank You cards throughout the year, we will pick up one here & there, & bring them on our cruise. If we feel like handing out an extra tip here or there, we put it in the card with a few words.

## CRUISECRITIC

➤ TheGo6Girl: Your cruise starts long before you get to the ship. Read [CruiseCritic](#) boards. Its addictive yes, & you might not agree with all of the information on it, but there is a lot of good useful info on them.

CruiseCritic is *very slow* between 4:30–5:30 AM, Eastern Standard Time. It's probably maintenance.

➤ DarryDFL: If you've never used CruiseCritic before, we offer free tips for registration, security, & more: <http://DarryD.com/cc>.

## CUSTOMS.

DarryDFL: Customs was the delay in entering the boarding area. Men: Speed up passing through customs by either placing all your stuff into a hip bag, a 1-gallon plastic bag, or your wife's purse before you enter Customs. Its amazing how long it took men to empty all the stuff from their pockets — & the stuff they carry. If a U.S. citizen, your passport is only ID you need. Note: Customs is not the time to try out your latest comedy routine.

## DINING

- FredR: Participate in formal night. Taking a jacket & tie (him) & black pants/top (her) is not going to ruin your packing.
- FredR: Do not let problems fester. See the Head waiter for the dining room or the Pursers office if you need assistance. Usually the first night of a cruise

the conversation at dinner can be quiet but as you get to know each other generally this really improves.

- DireMongoose: You can order as much food as you want in the main dining room in whatever combination you want. If you want to order 3 appetizers & no main course, you can do that! Want an extra lobster tail, you can get it.
- Kulpn: Eat whatever you want; it comes right off after the cruise. They use lots of salt.
- StarTraveler: By asking our waiter, I found out the “pecking order” of the wait staff: vests were assistant waiters; jackets were waiters; & red jackets were wine stewards.
- CroozyMooner: Don’t hesitate to switch tables at dinner if you don’t like your dining companions. Its your vacation.
- Griffy: Don’t break in line at the buffet.
- ThePatientOne: At dinner, DO NOT BE LATE!! It is rude to keep your table-mates waiting. If you are going to be late or are not going to eat in the dinning room at night, just let your table-mates know..
- ThePatientOne: You are handed a menu. If you want 2 of something, just ask. If nothing on the menu “floats your boat”, ask for a steak. It will be done. They are there to make YOU happy.
- ErinMarie424: Try breakfast & lunch in the Main Dining Room & a sandwich in the Deli at least once.
- Mrs. Pete: Eat lightly onboard. The first time I cruised, I was a little surprised at the small portions they served in the dining room, but I quickly realized that I wasn’t used to eating an appetizer & a salad or a soup & bread & an entree & at that first meal, I was simply too stuffed to eat dessert. What a tragedy! Now I choose EITHER an appetizer OR a soup or a salad & an entree & the dessert. I skip the bread entirely, judging it to be nothing I cant get at home. I can’t manage it all or, at least, I cant manage it all comfortably.
- Camii40: If you have an early dinner seating, get there on time. It stresses the waiter if you are late. He has another seating after you.
- DarryDFL: Not only does it stress the waiter & the assistant waiter, but it alienates your fellow diners. It means that every course is served late. If your fellow diners have commitments after dining, they will either be late for it or will have to leave early. If my friend, Rich, has to leave early & miss dessert, *you* will be mentioned — in anger — frequently, for the remainder of the evening.

- JCM996: If you criticize the food on the ship, please also include the magazine/newspaper you write the food column for, include at least 3 personal references, & pictures of the offending dishes. I have never had a bad meal on a ship, if I didn't like it I ordered something else. Besides, you didn't have to cook it, serve it or clean up.
- DarryDFL: Question: I've seen a lot of people saying that if you don't like your dining companions you can change them but do you always have dining companions? I thought I read that anytime dining can be just the two of us. Answer: For Anytime Dining, you can request a "table for 2," & it's not a problem. However, I suggest that you'll have more fun getting a table for 4 or 6 because you'll meet others. It is from others that you learn what is NOT posted in the Daily Schedule; where to go/not go at the next port; places on the ship that you didn't know existed, but you'd love to see; etc.

## DISCOUNTS.

- PegEggFL: Some cruise lines (like RCI) offer discounts on a future sailing if you book it while on a current cruise. In addition, you'll get onboard credits. We apply these to the tips so its less money to carry. You can always cancel your booking at no cost if you follow the cruise lines cancellation schedule. You can give your travel agents info for her to get credit. Likewise, your travel agent can still work to get you a price reduction.
- Cruise Wizard: You can get special onboard credit when you book while cruising on Royal Caribbean. That booking can also be transferred to your Travel Agent if you use one. You need to sign up for the Crown & Anchor Society too — there are additional balcony discounts as you continue to cruise. We have an RCCL Visa card & have had 2 "free" cruises so far. You can charge your cruise on the Visa & get 2X points for ever \$1 you spend on RCCL & 1X on everything else.
- ClakkWGrisswald: Yes, you can get onboard credits for your next cruise if you book while onboard. However, you cannot combine them with the Crown & Anchor Club (C&A) balcony discounts. You can only use one or the other; not both. I purchased a Next Cruise certificate on my Oct/2008 Liberty of the Seas cruise, looking forward to getting both the \$100 On-board Credit with the certificate & the \$100 C&A balcony discount. However, the rules for combining discounts changed in Jan/2009. When I booked this Freedom

cruise in Mar/2009, it was too late to use both. So it doesn't really make sense for me to even purchase next cruise certificates, since I already get the C&A balcony discount.

➤ **WannaSail4ever:** Jim, Butch & I have booked a B2B on the Oasis on Oct. 16<sup>th</sup> & Oct. 23<sup>rd</sup> of 2010. If you book onboard the Freedom, you will get a \$100.00 per cabin *onboard credit* (OBC). We booked last Oct. & did get our balcony discounts as well. If you later transfer to a TA, it is likely that they will also give you OBC. Most of the time, that's \$100 per cabin too. It may depend on the type of cabin that you book. If you enjoy cruising RCCL, you definitely should get an RCCL Visa before you get off the ship because you can get double points for your onboard expenses & also your deposit on the Oasis. Actually, you get that visa before you leave here. There should be a link on the RCCL website.

➤ **TwoPiratesLookAt50:** You shouldn't wait till you are on board. Last Dec, we priced 2 weeks southern Caribbean, but decided to wait till Feb/to book on board. Price went up both weeks by \$200-per-person, so were paying \$800 more & have no on-board credit due to changes to RCCL's policy this year.

## DIABETIC AID

➤ **DarryDFL:** If You're diabetic, let your cabin attendant know. He will provide you with a box for your used syringes. There is no cost for this service.

## DOCUMENTS

➤ **DooAndHerb:** Bring your passport; not a birth certificate.

➤ **Barry Mac:** Get your documents in order before you leave home. All cruise lines offer online registration these days. USE IT! When you have completed all the documents, print two copies. One you keep on you to check in, the other is in your luggage as a backup. We do 3 so that each of us has a copy in-hand. Make photocopies of passport, medicine prescriptions, return airline tickets, & emergency contacts to put in your luggage as well.

➤ **Sleepless:** I make 2 copies of all of my cruise-related documents, as well as photo ID, passport, credit cards & important family phone numbers. One copy, I leave with a trusted family member back home. The other, I put in the

safe in the cabin. I have never had to use the copies, but they are a good source of security. Never know when they may be needed.

➤ BJS323X: DH & I have different last names so I always bring a copy of our marriage certificate. (A friend who is a public health director in the US pointed out if one of us got sick in another country, we may need to prove we were married & had the right to make decisions for the other). I guess the same would be true for carrying documentation of proof of custody/birth certificates if children have a different last name than you.

## DOOR DECORATING

➤ PegEggFL: You can buy magnetic paper so that you can print a nice door sign for your cabin. It lets others know that You're willing to meet new people. On our cruises, we get praise for ours & usually find out people use it to tell when they're near their own cabin. We buy Staples Inkjet Magnetic Sheets, (4) 8½" x 11" sheets, Item 386943, Model 34747-CC, for \$15. You can also buy Staples Sticker Paper, one 8½" x 11" sheet, Item 490429, Model 70972, for \$12.50.



➤ DarryDFL: When we can't use magnetic paper, we use Loctite Fun-Tak Mounting Putty, in the Office Supplies section of Walmart for \$1.50 (see figure).

➤ Leigh61870: This year is the first year we bought something to decorate the cabin door. The cabin is easier to find.

➤ INeedAShot (Joe&Donna): Decorate you cabin doors to let everyone know that The Pirates are onboard! Use your own ideas. You can decorate any way you like but please remember not to uses tacks or tape. The doors will hold magnets as well as that blue Artist's Putty that you can find with school supplies or at craft stores.



➤ JCM996: An easy-to-remove door decoration. Not a sticker, but they make removable cling. Print something on it, put it on the outside of your cabin door. Finding your room is much easier, & if you invite guests to your room. (And on the 2<sup>nd</sup>-to-last day, move it 2 doors down, & watch the other people who were also using it try to get into the wrong room.)

## DUNN'S RIVER FALLS

- DarryDFL: "Water Shoes" are required for all Dunn's River Fall tours in Ocho Rios. They are \$20 onboard the ship.

## ELEVATORS

- Mommyof1: Be prepared to walk up & down a lot of stairs. The elevators are slow, so its sometimes faster to use the stairs. By the end of every cruise my calves are killing me, but it's a great way to tone them.
- GlendaleCruiser, Feb/11/2010: Don't worry. There are plenty of elevators & lifts. The stairs are a great way to get exercise, but if you cant manage them, you will be fine. The best thing to do is find your way around ship so that you are not always going for an elevator because you forgot that the shops are on the same level as "x" that you wanted to go to. Elevators are right next to the dining rooms & the buffet, so don't worry about it.
- Kulpn: Let people out of elevator before getting on.

## END OF CRUISE

- See "[Customs](#)" in this document.
- DireMongoose: Check to see which other ships are starting/ending cruises in the same port the same day when figuring out if you are going to fly in early or out late — for some ports this really doesn't matter, but I don't recommend anyone try to fly out of San Juan airport the same day another 10,000+ cruise passengers are debarking if you can help it.
- Ptdodd: I suggest flying out the day after your ship arrives back. Last year on Jan/3rd, we were going out of Mobile, AL, on the *Carnival Holiday* (now retired) & there was rain & heavy fog. The ship was not allowed into port due to poor visibility. When it finally was allowed in, the passengers did not disembark until 4 p.m. We didn't get embark until 6 p.m. & couldn't get into our rooms until around 7:30 p.m. Needless to say, I'm sure there were a lot of people that missed their flights. Between weather, traffic accidents & Murphy's Law anything can happen.

## EVENTS NEWS

- GordonChick: Read the daily paper to know what's going on board the ship the next day.
- Cruiser2B2: I bring a highlighter with me so I can highlight the things that I don't want to miss.
- Ithaca Gal: Save all the daily activity/events papers that you get — a great way to remember your cruise!

## EXERCISE

- FredR: Get some exercise every day. This includes a long walk around the ship. Use stairs when going places.
- FitNick: Want to cruise without gaining weight? Stop riding the elevator — use the stairs instead. Take two walks around the ship daily. If its too windy outside, walk around inside. Take your camera. You'll never know when you'll see that one, unique thing you want to remember.

## FIRST AID KIT

- Adri204 — I like to pack trim & slim as it where, but still pack things like a small First Aid Kit that actually stays in my small purse I use every single day. It has Band-Aids, antiseptic wipes, adhesive bandages, a couple of Midol. It goes every where I go & I've used it a lot.

## FIRST DAY ONBOARD

[Source](#): 22 Do's & Don't's for Your First Day Onboard a Cruise Ship

## FORMAL NIGHTS

- DarryDFL: I wear a tux with silk t-shirts. One tux; 3 shirts; 3 formal nights handled easily. I change from tux to informal wear immediately after dining to keep the tux fresh. Febreze Fabric Refresher is a breeze.
- CruzinForever: Rent the formal wear from the ship. It saves a lot of weight & worry.
- BJS323X: No one cares if you wear the same outfit for both formal nights.

- GlendaleCruiser: Formal night is like attending a party. I get to wear nicer clothes (my fave is my little black dress) & heels. The food & atmosphere in the Main Dining Room (MDR) is upbeat & everyone (for the most part) is on their best behavior & in a good mood. The wait staff adds to that atmosphere. My friends & I go from station-to-station to have our pictures taken even though we rarely buy them. Once in awhile we do — \$22 for an 8X10 is actually cheap & you are looking your best. Also, you wont get lobster at the buffet that night — only in the MDR.
- DarryDFL: Formal night usually requires a tux; or a suit & tie or ascot; or a jacket & tie. I wear a tux & a silk t-shirt. Some ships will permit you with a shirt & tie, but your table mates may frown upon it. If your boyfriend does not have a jacket, take your boyfriend to a second-hand store, & buy him one. You're going to meet a "million" people, but You're not going to be dating them. Your date will be on your arm. However, you want him to be as comfortable as possible in this somewhat challenging environment. You want him to blend in so that all eyes will be upon his arm candy — you.
- Lspencer: On formal night, you will see anything from Tux to shirt & ties. Wear what you are comfortable in wearing. My hubby & I had great pictures of him in dark suit & tie & me in a long black dress with glittery jacket. On the second formal night, I used the same black dress with a shawl instead of jacket. Never would know unless I told you!
- geojobs: Much to the dismay of many "Dress Code Police" posters here on CC, a shirt & tie & a nice pair of pants (not shorts!) & your BF will be fine. I, personally don't care what anyone wears. I don't usually look, especially at guys. I do wear a suit or a tux, but that's me.
- jcm996: Personally, I have never wore a jacket or a tie to formal night. Jacket takes up to much room in a suit case — scuba gear is more important. I have never worn tee-shirt or jeans. Just a nice button down shirt & dress pants.

## HANGERS

- PegEggFL: Pack all clothes on hangers including shorts. If you have a suit, or multi-piece outfit, put both on one hanger to save space which makes unpacking quicker. Put a dry cleaner bag over all clothes that wrinkle easily, this will keep them less wrinkled.

► RobinTed, Dec/07/2010: The couple of hangers provided on cruise ships aren't enough for week-long trips. So I save wire hangers from the dry cleaner & slip a few into our suitcases while packing. I then leave them behind for the next passenger.

## HIGHLIGHTER

► Smokeyham: A small highlighter is great to mark up the ships news. There's lots of announcement in the paper, & it can be frustrating to go back to try & find that one thing you know you want to do.

## HONEYMOONERS

1. Ask about a tour of bridge/engine room, cause you are honeymooners.
2. Bride should wear a small veil on first day, people will buy you drinks the whole cruise.
3. Let your wait-staff know you are honeymooners. They will sing to you.
4. Some couples move a mattress to the balcony so they can sleep (\*wink\*) one or two nights out there.
5. Relax & have fun!!!

## INSURANCE

- CheryLandtk: Read that contract so you understand what it does & does not cover.
- DarryDFL: *Why you must get travel insurance.* “Cruise ship leaves family over medical issue,” WPTV (Florida), Aug/26/2009, Ecstasy, Carnival Cruise Lines. For the full story, visit <http://DarryD.com/CC/Insurance.pdf>



Bill Buschmann & his wife Judy were so excited. They were taking a 7-day Caribbean cruise with their grandkids... They declined to purchase travel insurance... Had they purchased travel insurance they would have been eligible for up to \$30,000 in covered medical services & supplies, including transportation back home...” [As it was, Bill had to pay for the medical services, the hospital & travel home by air for his entire family.]

For Bill a lot of money was spent on a vacation his family never got to take. “*If the ships doctor puts you off the ship, You’re off,*” said Bill....

## INTERNET

- 2Dogs: Public libraries in the ports of Key West, Alaska, Puerto Rico, & the Virgin Islands are a tremendous money-saver. During a port stop on a recent Alaska cruise, we found a city library that offered free web use for 15–30 minutes. Our only cost was a short wait in line for our turn.
- CruzinForever: Internet cafes available at most ports, there are computers on board (Air time is 56–65 cents a minute & very slow. The average email can cost \$4–\$5); not worth it!
- Calgon1: Turn off the cell phone. The same goes for the Internet. Both are very expensive at sea. If You’re so vital to your business, friends, etc. that you absolutely, positively, *have* to stay in touch, then stay home with them & watch the Travel Channel. The reason You’re on vacation is not to work, its to decompress from your normal daily life. So, do it. No matter how important you think you are, the reality is that You’re not. If you were to drop dead right now, your business & the rest of the world would keep on spinning. So, turn off the cell phone & don’t get on the Internet.
- DarryDFL: If you plan on linking to your office using computers while on a cruise, coordinate with the company technicians to ensure that you can. This article might aid you in talking with your technicians. “Shark Tank,” *Computer-World* magazine, Jul/12/2010, p. 31: “User calls this help desk pilot fish

[technician] complaining that he can't connect to the company network via VPN.

[ *Wikipedia*: A virtual private network (VPN) is a network that uses a public telecommunication infrastructure, such as the Internet, to provide remote offices or individual users with secure access to their organization's network. It aims to avoid an expensive system of owned or leased lines that can only be used by one organization. The goal of a VPN is to provide the organization with the same, secure capabilities, but at a much lower cost.]

“The user was full of bluster, telling us how many millions of dollars of sales will be lost if he isn't able to connect in and send a vital e-mail,' says fish. 'We tried many, many different debugging techniques, to no avail. Finally, one of the techs came up with the right question: 'What network are you connecting to?'

“Turns out the user was on a cruise ship in the middle of the Caribbean. We have a 500ms timeout on successful key negotiation, so satellites are out of the question. I jumped on the call to relieve the tech who was trying to stifle his laughter, and offered the user payment on his next mai tai.”

## IRON

➤ DarryDFL: Do *not* bring travel irons. They are not permitted & will be confiscated, but returned when you reach home port.

## KIDS PROGRAM

➤ PictureMom: Push the Kids Program because once they go, they will love it. My son (who was almost 7 on our on Carnival Freedom cruise) started out a little shy, not knowing what to expect, but once he was there once he loved it. He couldn't wait to go each day. We certainly spent a lot of time together, but its nice to have our separate time! He got his alone-time to play & make new friends; but, more importantly, we got some alone time to do what we wanted to do. Even if that was lounging in the sun & doing nothing! It is so great to take them to the kids program & get to enjoy a show after dinner. A couple of nights, we even had him stay after 10 PM & paid for him to stay so we could go to a comedy show or go to the piano bar. It sure worked out great

for us. Now we are planning our next cruise in Apr. My son will be almost nine. He cant wait to do it again!

➤ Bnaj: My kids couldn't even sit through our dinner without asking when they could go back to the camp. Cruising is the BEST when you have small kids. They love the camp & that gives us the time we need to be together & see shows. My kids are a little older (13 & 10), but we go & see the evening show & if it is "clean," we usually get the kids out of the camp to come & see the later show.

## LAUNDRY

➤ FredR: Ships have self-service laundries & sometimes there will be a special price on laundry & dry cleaning.

➤ Woan: Onboard laundry was very expensive. I was very glad to have packed enough clothes to last the whole trip.

➤ HdgDanceMom: I see we cant do this on RCL, but Disney had Laundry rooms. Those Purex sheets are awesome. Make sure to find out how much the machines are for a wash & dry, so you can pack enough quarters since they aren't always available. I will have to rethink my normal packing strategy now that we wont have a laundry room available!

## LUGGAGE

➤ DarryDFL: We use 3"x 5," laminated labels — in bright yellow — on our luggage listing name, address, phone number & email address. It makes them easy to spot from a distance. Also, we have business card size labels — with the same info — attached inside of the luggage.

(One cruiser had a problem with an airline because his outside tag disappeared.) The white tag, in the photo, is our "luggage contents" tag. It tells which has the formal wear, which has the electronics, etc.

➤ GrumpyGramps: I place a large strip of red duct tape with our cabin number, in large, black letters, printed on it.

➤ "Gumby: We attach the cruise line-supplied luggage tags (they have our cabin number on them) to the items we carry around the ship — binoculars,



knitting bag, etc. This way, if we forget something by the pool or in the dining room, it can easily be returned by a crew member.

➤ StarTraveler: We use one carry-on per person. I've packed for 10 days using one suitcase that fits in an overhead airline compartment.

➤ SiagonRon: Tie carry-ons together with a bungee cord.

➤ Leigh61870: This year is the first year we bought ribbons to put on our suitcases. It sounds dumb — until you see everyone's suitcase in one room & your trying to find yours!

➤ Barry Mac: Some cruise lines allow you to print your luggage tags from home. If you are concerned that they are too flimsy, you can get regular tags at the departure terminal. Just make sure you put your name & cabin number on them before you let the porters take them. And tip the porters \$2-per-bag & they will make it to your cabin instead of going to Aruba without you.

➤ Mrs. Pete: Mail a package to myself at the first-night hotel; a package containing all my toiletries. It completely eliminates the problem of flying with liquids. Last summer, I picked up a \$14 pre-paid mailer (stuff as much as you want into that package) that held my family of four's toiletries for three weeks. (It was packed tightly, but it had everything from shaving cream to sunscreen.) I called a couple days ahead & verified that it was waiting for us at our first night hotel. So much easier than bothering with the 3-ounces & Ziplocs. This plan allowed my husband to have his pocket knife.

➤ JKrossel: Use suitcases that nest so you have more space under the bed for laundry etc. That means that the suitcases can fit inside each other so that you only have the largest suitcase size to store. The rest will be inside the large one.

☆ "How to Beat Baggage Fees," By Jonnelle Marte *The Wall Street Journal*, Jul/25/2010, <http://tinyurl.com/2csb8to>

But there are ways to minimize or avoid the expense.

One is a credit-card loyalty program. Certain American Express Delta SkyMiles credit-card holders can check the first bag free on any Delta Air Lines flight. They just need to present a loyalty number when booking. And the waiver is good for up to nine travelers on the reservation.

Continental Airlines waives baggage fees for certain Continental Airlines Chase card holders who present their credit card at check-in, some 1<sup>st</sup>- and business-class customers and active military personnel.

Delta and Continental charge \$23 for the first bag with online check-ins and \$25 at the airport. Starting Aug. 1, Spirit Airlines will charge \$19 for checking in the first bag online, and \$25 at the airport.

For a \$249 annual fee, a traveler and up to eight companions can check as many as two bags each per flight on all flights with United. Baggage fees start at \$25 on domestic flights.

Meantime, Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants offers a credit of up to \$25 for guests who show proof of a charge for a second checked bag.

## MAP OF HOME

➤ Ronald S.: Before traveling, I find a small US map outline, print it & keep it in my wallet. When I meet someone, if asked where I'm from, I can pull out my map & point.

## MAP OF SHIP

➤ CampGirl: Bring along a map of the deck plans from the brochure you get in any travel agency. It is hard to memorize where everything is & it seems as though the map in books are larger & easier to see. It was handy to have when we first got on the ship, since we had no idea where anything was.

➤ R&RFraz, Feb/5/2010: I cut out the deck plan map from the cruise book I got from a travel agent. I made copies of the deck that have all public spaces (not cabin decks) I laminated them & will be giving them out to each family that will be traveling in our group. The map they give you on board is not very detailed, & the size makes them a challenge to read for some.

➤ Smokeyham: Once on board, get a couple of copies of the ship's deck plan. You can get them from the pursers/reception desk.

## MEDICINE

➤ DarryDFL: <http://DarryD.com/CC> has a **Packing List**.

➤ BJS323X: Bring a small number of cold tablets, Band-Aids, anti-acids, Tylenol, etc.. They cost a fortune on the ship.

## MEMENTOS

- CarolC: For sales on cruise mementos, pick the last sailing in a particular region. We like to buy shipboard souvenirs, so we try to choose a ship that's completing its run of an area — that's when merchandise is generally put on sale. Last year, for example, on a sailing in South America, all of the T-shirts, glassware, & jackets were 75% off.
- DonnaVLP: Its fun to barter with the locals. Just make sure you have plenty of Ones (\$1). Its not so good to get them down, & then reach into your pocket & discover you only have bigger bills!
- DonnaVLP: Yes, they are selling their stuff. The only disappointing thing was it was the same on every island, at every stop. They must bring it over in a container from China & sell to the locals for \$1. They, of course, tell you that \$10 is a good deal. Just amazing how all the "local" crafts are same throughout the islands.

## MEMORIES

- RoadTripper: Start thinking about a ritual you want to do each time on a cruise. (As there will be more than this one hopefully.) If you don't do one on your first cruise, you cant say you have always done the same thing every cruise.
- AshleyF: I love to document my travels, but hate carrying my journal around everywhere — & I often forget to write in it at night. I buy a postcard every day & jot down a few sentences on the back. At the end of the trip, I add the notes to a memories box with cards from other journeys.
- CptSticky: Bring a small handheld tape recorder & make notes every night. You'll be surprised how much you forget when you get home. Which island was that?
- GrandBistro: I always take a small spiral notebook on vacation — a new one for each trip, & write down names & contact info of new friends, highlights of the day, a good story I heard, etc. It keeps the trip much fresher in my mind once its over.
- Frank Jess: I take a Travel Journal with me on every trip. I love to capture the silly comments, beautiful moments & awesome sights every day. I make a point to spend time every night "getting it all down."

➤ DarryDFL: Ensure that each of your crew has his/her own camera. Encourage all of them to photograph that which interests them. After the cruise, make a date to share the photos you take. (You can, of course, show them on any PC.) You'll be surprised & thrilled at the things each of you saw that the others missed. That's what we do after every cruise, & I can tell you from experience, it is a night of laughter, sharing & insights that will make this cruise one none of you will ever forget.

## MONEY

➤ DarryDFL: When you travel, don't let it be a surprise to your credit card company.

➤ debshomespun: We've never had any problems with currency in Jamaica or Mexico, and been to them many times. They are more than willing to take our US dollars. I always make sure I have lots of change, (small bills) ones, fives and tens whenever I go out shopping. This way, I don't have to worry about change. I collect coins from the Caribbean Islands, so I do like to get the coins in return!

Also, while in Labadee, the artisans market takes US dollars. I always take lots of ones, and fives while shopping there. You can barter with the Haitians while shopping. They have some really neat stuff to buy!

➤ CroozyMooner: As a very rough guide to how much extra money you'll spend: Pretend like You're taking a 3<sup>rd</sup> passenger. In other words, if your 7 day cruise costs \$700-per-person, budget roughly \$700 for tips, excursions, drinks, parking at the port, souvenirs, etc. Obviously very inexact (and probably on the low side for many if you drink more than one drink a day, gamble, use the spa, or fly to the ports). I think some people with a \$2000 vacation budget might blow their budget significantly when they book a cruise at \$1000-per-person thinking everything is included.

➤ DooAndHerb: Have lots of \$1 & \$5 bills handy (about \$250 worth). Get them at your local bank a week before you leave.

➤ ZoeTheSailor: My bank gives us free travelers checks which I cash at the pursers desk when there is no line. Cabins have safes in them if You're worried about taking a lot of cash with you.

➤ GlendaleCruiser: Answering the question, "Can 3 adults in one room have three separate sail & sign accounts?" Absolutely! Each can get your own Sail

& Sign account with a different “folio” number. If are using cash, take it to Guest Services (the Purser) & apply it toward your S&S.

➤ MyDogBuffett: You can have separate accounts. I booked Conquest on May/9 with a friend. His stuff goes on his credit card, & mine goes on mine. Filled out the documents online & it has a place to do this.

➤ Snorkel2Much: If you are planning to use your credit cards in the Caribbean, you should call your credit card company before you go, & let them know your travel plans. Due to fraud issues, many will automatically block offshore transactions unless you have a recent history of such purchases. It only takes a few minutes now, but the phone rates per minute in the Caribbean can be steep in some places if you wait to call from there.

➤ In answer to the question, “Does anybody know if we need to do some currency exchange in Puerto Rico or St. Marteen? I know St. Thomas uses US currency but not sure about the other ports.”

★ DarryDFL: All the ports we’re visiting accept US currency. Puerto Rico & St. Thomas, as a US territories, use US currency the same as in the states. If you’ve got a US credit card, you’ve got currency.

★ Snorkel2Much: On St Maarten/St Martin, just about any business that has any chance to support the tourist trade accepts US dollars, & marks their prices accordingly. Some of the off-the-beaten-path grocery stores & “locals” shops mark prices only in Netherlands Antilles Guilders (Dutch side) or Euros (French side), but even those take US dollars.

## MUST HAVE ITEMS

➤ GordonChick: Take **half the stuff; twice the money.**

➤ DooAndHerb: Bring a **waterproof case** to go around your neck & hold your ID, cruise card, etc. while swimming in port.

➤ Leigh61870: Make the kids bring their school **backpacks** — great for getting off ship to carry their own things: snorkel, mask, etc.

➤ Leigh61870: I find **walkie talkies** very handy.

➤ Barry Mac: **Bug repellent!** We were on an excursion to Mayan ruins in Costa Maya, 20 miles out in the jungle. When we realized we hadn’t brought any we ran down to the ship store – which didn’t carry it. As soon as we docked, we ran to the first store we could find since we only had 10 minutes

before the bus left. None to be found. Diamond bracelets yes; bug spray, not a drop. Fortunately, the tour guide had some when we arrived at the ruins.

➤ Jebba555: My top 5 cruise must-haves:

❶ **Power Strip**

❷ Just like any beach trip, **sunscreen** & aloe vera!

❸ \$3 blow up **water float** (instead of paying \$10-15 to rent one)

❹ Travel **Alarm Clock** (no clocks in the staterooms)

❺ Cheap **waterproof watch** (perfect for by the pool or the ports)

➤ T&DCruisers: I brought a couple battery-operated **tealights** with to keep on each night stand. They were invaluable when trying to navigate the way to the bathroom in the interior cabin.

➤ DarryDFL: Do NOT use candle wick tealights; fire hazard.

➤ KayBee2517: **Ziploc bags** are great for cameras/cell phones & other things you don't want to get wet when on shore if you don't have a waterproof bag of some kind for carrying all your stuff.

➤ TravelFreak: A few more things we take along the line of Ziploc bags: small scissors, post-its, rubber bands, clothes pins (keeps the drapes closed when that early sun comes in to wake you). Every cruise I've taken a **big, insulated cup!** I fill it with ice, tea, lemonade, etc. for beside the pool. The cups onboard are tiny.

➤ Happy KS: We had to search in port for **cough syrup** once my son started a cough & it took us 2 hours to find it. Another time, my daughter scratched her leg & it was frustrating looking for **Band-Aids**. Small amounts of most typical **over-the-counter meds**.

➤ Happy KS: We don't skimp on & get **full-size sunscreen** — a full bottle for each person. A vacation can be ruined by sunburn.

➤ DE2323: I take a paper **hole punch** & the **stretch cords** with the clips at one end (like the ones you get from casinos for free) & hole punch the Sign & Sail Card (make sure you don't punch where the strip is on the back) put it on the key chain end. Kids clip them on their pants or wrap around their wrists or as a necklace. Keeps it from getting lost!

➤ Pamela30FL: I wear tennies very rarely. I brought the tennies to walk around Cozumel but I forgot to bring **socks**. Poor hubby & I went into EVERY single shop looking for socks. By the time we found them I had horrible blisters from the shoes I had just bought to bring on the cruise.

- Ripeka: Instead of duct tape, I take a roll of sticky **sports strapping tape**. (See [Sports Tape](#) paragraph, below.)
- INeedAShot, Feb/22/2010: Use blue **Artist's Putty**, that you can find with school supplies or at craft stores, on your cabin door decoration.
- UlvaZell: I use a **backpack** as my carry-on for the plane & in port. Its great for carrying what we need as well as any purchases in port.
- Layditx1: Those "waterproof" containers sometimes leak, so take a few **sandwich-size Ziploc baggies** & put your stuff in (S/S card, cash, etc.), squish all the air out, & then put it in your waterproof container. It works great!
- Jerry2457: Take a light-weight **poncho** or **umbrella** in case it's raining in port. There are still things to do & see if the weather is bad!
- HokieFans: Do take:
  - ★ **Clear packing tape**: It was essential for the covering the luggage tags we printed off from the Princess web site.
  - ★ **Lanyards**: Awesome for your cruise card. I also put my coffee card on it & just reinforced the corner with tape.
  - ★ **Quarters** for the washer & dryer: Even if you don't think you will do laundry, you may get caught in a downpour & need to dry your clothes so that you can pack them. Also, you won't have to fight with the change machine.
  - ★ **Local currency**: We had purchased ours before leaving & didn't have to deal with the poor exchange rate on the ship's ATM. As well, we had a friend whose bank card was "eaten" by an ATM in a port & they lost an hour doing paperwork!
  - ★ **Purel 3-in-1 Laundry Sheets**: Four in a baggie & were done.
  - ★ **Luggage scale**: It got a workout that last night, but worth the money we saved from being overweight.
  - ★ **PacSafe money belts** & purse: Pickpocket & slash proof. Great products. They don't replace caution & common sense but do reassure.
  - ★ **Labels** pre-printed with the addresses of people you want to send postcards to: We do it from every port to the kids in the family; it saved time & I didn't have to carry an address book off the ship.
  - ★ An **eBook Reader**: I am an avid reader & it was so much easier to load this up with a dozen books than trying to fit them into my luggage. Don't forget the charger!
- Javanaut, Jun 7/2010: **Thermometer** (or two) for temperature in cabin & on balcony. We have a travel alarm with a thermometer.

- Javanaut: **1-to-3 wall plug** for my battery chargers.

## NAME TAGS

- DarryDFL: We no longer offer *free* name tags; but include these items on your name tag: ❶ the name you want to be called; ❷ city, state (or equivalent if non-U.S.); ❸ CC name or relationship. Rather than CC name, you can specify DW, DH, or others. For abbreviations, see “[Terms](#)” at our website. For more info, read “Name Tags” at <http://darryd.com/CC>.



- DarryDFL, Jun 23/2010: Write your cabin number on the back of your name tag. First, it will remind you where your cabin is. Second, if you misplace it, someone can return it to you.,

## NOTES CLIP

- DarryDFL: The cabin walls are metal, so stop at a Dollar Store & buy a clip with a magnetic backing so that you can place important notes on the inside wall next to the door of your cabin.

## PACKING CHECKLIST

- DarryDFL: Be sure to pack all the items you'll need. See PegEgg's “[Packing Checklist](#)”.
- Happy KS: Your packing list should be personal & customized for your own use, there is no one packing list that fits all. Mine has been whittled down over the years, I take what is essential & crucial & leave the “what-ifs” at home. We take:
  - ★ Clothing & shoes. Pack from the shoes up to eliminate multiple pairs.
  - ★ A small mending kit

★ Our own toiletries (I disagree the ship stuff is fine, only use it if you want dried out hair for a few weeks after the cruise) I have a personalized makeup travel kit that took a lot of tweaking to get it right, it is always packed. In it is all the tools I need in travel sizes, all my makeup is powdered so it doesn't have to take up precious 3-1-1 space.

★ A travel-sized blow dryer as backup. I've had too many non-working blow dryers on ships.

★ A small first aid kit with sample representations of remedies for common ailments, it fits into a clear 4 X 6 makeup bag

★ Our camera with plenty of memory & batteries

★ Our iPods & travel speakers

★ A small battery powered alarm clock

★ My DVD player (one over-packing item as I can't sleep without it) If we were driving to port our pillows, if flying we just suffer the week without them

★ A very small fan, although these can be confiscated & held at port until disembarkation

★ A short extension cord, a 3-outlet power strip.

➤ GrandBistro: I take my iPod with external speakers for some music in the room, or to listen to interesting podcasts while winding down. It also plays videos, & I sometimes use one of my familiar recorded TV shows to help me fall asleep.

## **PESOS REQUIRED?**

➤ MasterBaker: Don't shoot the messenger here, but I'm starting to see multiple recent posts on multiple boards on CC that many vendors in Mexican ports are now refusing to accept US\$ and are requiring pesos for payment. It appears the Mexican government is attempting to curb money laundering by limiting the amount of US\$ Mexicans can deposit in their banks, basically forcing businesses to require payment in pesos from Americans. This is very new and who knows how long it will last. You might need to exchange some \$ if this doesn't change before we sail.

➤ Travel Yucatan, "Newly Released Mexican Regulations Imposing Restrictions on Mexican Banks for Transactions in U.S. Currency," June 15, 2010, <http://www.TravelYucatan.com/first-8.htm>: — Mexico has implemented new banking regulations regarding U.S. currency.

Mexican banks can exchange USD currency for non-customers [persons without a valid bank account, i.e.: **tourist**] but many banks have recently applied restrictions allowing only customers to exchange USD currency to pesos.

Banks are limiting the amount an individual customer can exchange on a monthly basis forcing some Mexican vendors to stop accepting USD. These vendors will only accept payment in pesos.

*ATMs dispense pesos.*

Money exchange stores [*casa de cambio*] are still offering USD exchange services. This could change at any time.

Exchange your currency before you leave for Mexico taking Mexican Pesos only with you or be prepared to use ATMs.

## **PHOTOGRAPHY** (Also see [“Camera”](#) & [“Photos”](#))

► DarryDFL: Remember:

- ① Format your cameras card using the camera, not a computer.
- ② Never delete photos from your card using the camera.
- ③ Shoot without flash to save the battery.
- ④ If the sun or light is behind your subject, use the flash.
- ⑤ Look beyond the target person to ensure no items will be coming out of her head, like poles, flags, etc.
- ⑥ Avoid red-eye by having subject look to the left or right of the lens.
- ⑦ Carry a spare battery & spare card.
- ⑧ Bring your cameras manual. Some times only the manual will save you.
- ⑨ Let other CruiseCritic friends know the camera you have. If someone else uses that camera, she can help when things go wrong. PegEgg & I use the Panasonic DMC-TZ5 Lumix 9 megapixel with 10X optical zoom.
- ⑩ When you see that “Kodak moment,” shoot several shots. “Luck favors the prepared.”

Taking a photo aids in the enjoyment of that moment. Reviewing it takes one back to that moment — frozen forever in time. Sharing it reveals a part of ones self that no other media can afford.

What is important to me might be vital to someone else while being of no importance whatsoever to the next mortal. When I die, my songs shall go unsung, may my shared photos reside within the fondest memories of friends.

➤ JCM996: When you see a group of other cruisers trying to take pictures of each other in front of an attraction, take their camera, make them all get into the shot & take the picture for them.

## **PHOTOS** (Also see "[Camera](#)" & "[Photography](#)")

- Cruise Girl Forever: You don't have to buy every photo. Really how many do you need of you in that formal?
- CruzinForever: Don't buy the photos. They are very pricey & tend to wrinkle on the way home.
- StarTraveler: The photos can be pricey, but never had a problem with them wrinkling. Princess had a package of buying six, getting two free. You can buy a nice frame for only \$5 more.
- CroozyMooner: Skip the formal photos. They're way overpriced. And beware that some are *not* standard sizes. On our honeymoon in 2004, we bought a photo (the only one we've ever gotten), & didn't realize it was 6 x 8. We found an appropriate size frame a few months ago!
- GlendaleCruiser: I disagree. I've had family formal portraits taken at Department stores & always spent \$200 plus some, whether I liked them all or not. At about \$22-a-pop, & never buying the ones you don't like, I think they are a bargain. I usually decide I have enough & won't buy, but get them taken everywhere. Then I usually find one that I like enough to buy — its just over the price of a bingo card! Have them taken everywhere. Only buy the ones you want. Remember when you are 80, you will wish you had a picture of the younger, better looking you at this age. Carnival sells frames that match, but any craft store sells matte. I've never had a problem with that.
- Griffy: Don't buy every photo they take.
- ErinMarie424: Ship photographs — If you don't really like a particular background, you will not like a picture of yourself in front of it either. If you see a background you like, stop & get a picture taken. You don't have to buy it & you just never know. We had a couple taken "just for fun" on our last cruise, & one of them turned out absolutely great — the best picture ever of the two of us. We just bought the 8"x11" & made copies of it when we got home.
- Icemans Mom: If You're on a ship where they put the photos out for you to look at, once you have had more than one set of photos taken, find the first lot & "hide" them behind the second. Then take that pile the next night & put

them behind the third set & so on & so on. The staff will keep the pile together & so by the end of the cruise you just have to find your one big pile of photos. Much easier to go through them & discard the ones you don't want. So many people think that if they don't buy photos on the first night, they will get thrown away. They don't. So don't feel pressured into buying the first nice photo you see — there may be a better one later on.

➤ SailingPeace: There are very good photographers on the ship. It's a good time to get that special photo you will frame and keep forever; saves having to go to a studio. Many portrait sessions are in non-ship decors, and you can decide the next day if you buy the photo once you see it. Just plan it in your souvenir budget; it will last longer than t-shirts. Talk to a photographers; they really help you get something special.

## **POOL & HOT TUB**

- Kulpn: The pool water is cold & the hot tubs lukewarm, at best.
- ThePatientOne: Keep an open mind while relaxing around the pool. You will see things that you never thought you would see.

## **PORT CANAVERAL**

<http://darryd.com/CC2/TOC.pdf>

## **PORT OF MIAMI** (Facts sheet is under construction.)

<http://darryd.com/CC2/TOC.pdf>

## **PORT OF TAMPA**

<http://darryd.com/CC2/TOC.pdf>

## **PORTS OF CALL**

- FredR: Do some research on the ports as there are many ports you can see on your own — not spend any money or very little.
- FredR: Read the big board when leaving the ship that states when you need to be back on board the ship.

- **RoadTripper:** You don't have to go to the port "meetings" or sales pitch. You can watch all that on your TV in the cabin. They tape everything. Same with debarkation. You can watch all that on the cabin TV.
- **CruzinForever:** Use public transit at the ports, its so much cheaper.
- **CroozyMooner:** Research the ports ahead of time. Some places are excellent to do on your own (Key West, San Juan); others are not (Belize, Jamaica). Others have superb private tours (Costa Maya, Grand Cayman). The ports of call boards on CruiseCritic are an excellent place to start. *Frommer's* & *Fodor's* have excellent guidebooks to the ports of call.
- **Griffy:** Don't knock people down trying to be first to get off at the ports.
- **CptSticky:** Make sure you are always back on time. If not, you will embarrassed as you run for the ship, or maybe even miss it.
- **TimeForADaiquiri.** May/14/2010: I sincerely wish I had known on my first cruise that I did NOT have to get off the ship at every port. My Ex dragged my young son & I all over one of the ports. This was many, many years ago & it was just a bad experience.

## POSTCARDS

- **AshleyF:** I love to document my travels, but hate carrying my journal around everywhere — & I often forget to write in it at night. I buy a postcard every day & jot down a few sentences on the back. At the end of the trip, I add the notes to a memories box with cards from other journeys.
- **Ithaca Gal:** Don't promise to send postcards to the folks back home. It is difficult to get stamps & mail them on a short port visit!

## PREGNANCY

- **Carnivals Policy:** Guests who are 24 weeks or more into their pregnancy on the date of disembarkation will not be allowed to sail. Pregnant women less than 24 weeks must submit, prior to departure, Carnivals Pregnancy Certification Form, which must be completed & signed by the guests physician. On the Pregnancy Certificate Form, the attending physician will be required to certify the gestational period & that the expecting mother is fit to sail. Certification form: <http://xrl.us/bgtpuv>

➤ **Smokeyham:** Enjoy some of the “quiet times” aboard the ship: a walk around the deck before you go to bed, an early morning sunrise, or finding a seat in a quiet lounge during the day to read a book while sipping a coffee & enjoying the ocean rolling by. **Splurge:** Have a glass of champagne at 10:00 AM. Sleep in, order room service, or whatever sounds like fun.

## ONBOARD CHARGES

➤ **Jula:** A couple days before the end of your cruise, ask the Customer Service desk for a copy of your bill. You can check it over & make sure everything is in order. We have found mistakes. You can then correct them before the last day when the desk is very busy.

## REFRIGERATOR

➤ **MoonDawie:** Just ask your cabin steward & he will remove the contents of the refrigerator. It’s a small refrigerator & doesn’t get ice cold, but will do the trick. I also asked for a bottle opener & gave a little extra tip at the end.

## RITUALS

➤ **DarryDFL:** Bring your wife a hot cup of coffee so she’ll wake up to that “special blend” each morning. Yes, room service will do it; but, not like you can do.

➤ **GordonChick:** Watch at least 1 sunset & 1 sunrise.

➤ **2Dogs:** Meet at least one new person each day.

➤ **MrsPete:** Don’t be afraid to try new things.

➤ **ThePatientOne:** An Irish Coffee every night on the balcony before bed. A time to relax & reflect.

➤ **Kulpn:** Make love often — keeps the hubby cheerful.

➤ **DarryDFL:** Sunrise & sunset, as printed in the bulletins, are “guesstimates”. Arrive earlier than published.

➤ **ThePatientOne:** Make new friends. We did & are cruising with them in Oct.

➤ **Pungo3:** Our ritual is to stand at the very rear of the ship (aft for those who are nautical) and watch the land disappear. This is usually done at one of our ports, and hopefully the sun will be setting.

## ROOM SERVICE

- RoadTripper: Breakfast room service is wonderful. Don't forget to try it. Have a couple of bucks ready for a tip.
- TheGo6Girl: Call room service each day. Ask them to deliver a pitcher of ice water with lemon. It is nice to have that pitcher in your fridge when you get back from your days activities. (Don't forget to tip the room service person.)
- TheGo6Girl: Bring small **pre-made cello envelopes** with a \$2 tip (I add candy & a small pre-printed thank you) for room service. Our friends used to "make fun of me" for my creative tip envelopes; but when room service showed up when we were in the fjords with a second pot of hot coffee after we had been outside in the freezing cold for an hour (without having been called), everyone agreed it was because I gave that "goofy" tip.
- Jula: If you are in a balcony cabin, **order morning room service**. We always have morning coffee & juice delivered early. Then we go sit on the balcony, enjoy our coffee & check out our new port or just enjoy the sea view. It is a great start to the day.
- Jebba555: Give a **cash tip** when food is delivered. I'm not sure about varying your tip with the actual meal that is delivered.

## SALES

- FredR: Most ships have shops & these shops will have some very nice sales.
- Jula: If you can, postpone shopping on the ship the first few days. The sales in the shops & at the spa come on strong as you get closer to the end of the cruise.
- SailingPeace: There are great sales on jewelery and ship stuff the last day. Wait until then to buy stuff.

## SHIP VS PLANE FOR TRAVEL

► OakStreet, Mar/18/2010 (based upon web search today for stay of week of 4–11 Apr/2010): Which is less expensive, flying or cruising from Tampa to Nassau, in the Bahamas.

★ Carnival *Sensation* offers 4 nights from Port Canaveral to Freeport, Nassau (every Sunday) for \$299 based upon double occupancy for an inside cabin.

★ Wyndham Nassau Resort & Crystal Palace Casino is \$187-per-day; the Sheraton Nassau Beach Resort is \$249.83-per-day

★ Spirit Airlines flies Tampa to Nassau for \$74.13 round trip, but with stops in Fort Lauderdale (4-hour flight) or Miami (8-hour flight), but airline price of \$261 at FareCompare.com.

TAMPA TO NASSAU, 4 DAYS	
STATUS	COST
<b>PLANE &amp; MOTEL</b>	
Airline	\$75
Parking (\$9 x 4 days)	\$36
Motel (\$178 X 4 days)	\$712
TOTAL	<b>\$823</b>
<b>SHIP</b>	
Carnival Sensation (Port Lauderdale – Nassau)	\$299
Parking (\$15 x 4 days)	\$60
TOTAL	<b>\$359</b>

## SHIP'S NEWS

► SailingPeace: Read your [ship's news] as soon as you get it and do read all the info you are given as soon as you get it. Some deals (like extra minutes for Internet packages, etc.) are offered if you take them the first day. Some things only happen once and if you read about them too late — well, it's too late. Especially for a first time cruiser, those flyers and [ship's news] are your source of info. Not much if anything is posted elsewhere. So just in case : READ!

► Smokeyham: A small highlighter is great to mark up the ships news. There's lots of announcement in the paper, & it can be frustrating to go back to try & find that one thing you know you want to do.

## SHIPS

► CruzinForever: Stick to one cruise line, perks add up fast for frequent cruisers. Free drinks, free laundry, free internet, free spas.

- CroozyMooner: Don't hesitate to cruise an older ship, especially if its your first time cruising. Our upcoming cruise will be the first time we take a ship that was built in the new millennium! They're almost all beautiful in their own ways. The only time we were ever actually disappointed with the ship itself was the *Norwegian Majesty*.
- NinaYablok, Feb/25/2010: All cruise lines are different. If you see something mentioned that's important to you, go to the message board for YOUR cruise line here on CruiseCritic & ask the folks who travel on that particular line. As emphatic as people may sound that "The cruise line WILL do X" if its important to you ask. If the cruise board doesn't have the answer, call your travel agent or the cruise line itself. They do want you to be happy & know their policies in advance.
- SmokeyHam: Get to "know" your ship in advance by reading CruiseCritic reviews & joining the CruiseCritic roll call for your trip. Its sad to learn of a special place on board, where you would like to have spent time, on your last day! The reviews also help to let you know what to expect on board, so you can match your expectations with reality.

## SHOE ORGANIZER

- PegEggFL: A shoe organizer hung over the bathroom door is my solution for hotel-room clutter. The compartments are perfect for stashing everything from room keys & travel documents to toiletries and, of course, shoes. This is especially true for inside (tiny) cabins.

## SHOES

- Kulpn: Wear rubber soled shoes on deck; avoid slips & falls.
- Cruise Girl Forever: Less shoes: one day, one night pair that matches everything.
- SimpleLife: When it comes to shoes (especially for daytime), comfort trumps style.
- Charlene W: Disposable shower caps in motel bathrooms make great shoe covers. Just slip a cap over each shoe & you wont have to worry about getting everything in your suitcase dirty.
- MrsPete: Wear comfortable shoes, especially in port.

## SODA

► GrandBistro: If you know you'll drink a lot of sodas, buy a fountain drink card. But you might do just as well bringing the instant powder drinks that come in so many flavor. I bring a water bottle & crystal light lemonade packs & am content.

## SOLO TRAVELER

► AFCJ1: I've heard that if you're traveling solo, then it's a nicer experience to have the fixed dining time. Hopefully, you've had the Anytime Dining experience before & have enjoyed it. I don't eat late at home; but, I've come to enjoy the late seating when I'm on a cruise.

## SUN SCREEN

► Nekhabet: Bring more sunscreen than you think you will need & a higher SPF. If you are from a northern climate, you'll be surprised how fast you burn in the Caribbean sun. Spray on is worth the extra money because you have to re-apply sunscreen often.

► Betty215: I knew I needed tons of sunscreen. So I made sure to bring two big bottles. But one thing I wish I knew was to have a bottle in my carry on! I know that a full bottle of sunscreen can't go in my carry-on at the airport, but what I should have done was to put a bottle in the outside pocket of my checked in luggage so that when I get my luggage from the airport baggage claim, I can easily get it out of the luggage & stick it in the carry-on. We got sunburned the first day on the cruise. When we boarded the ship, we headed straight to the pool, changed into pool clothes that I made sure to pack in the carry on, but had no sunscreen.

### Sun Screen Protection

► Taraparrotthead: "Sea Life Friendly Sun Screen" info from Best Sun Screen on the Eco board: These won't harm the coral.

☆ "No-Ad" is available at Walmart and they donate a portion of their profit to a drug addiction program.

☆ "Mexitan," & "Kiss My Face." Trader Joe's < <http://Mecola.com> > carries some eco stuff. A comment said it was 50 SPF, very thick; but good, for nose & ears.

☆ “Sea Safe” from diving shops also protects from stinging creatures. Since I have run into tiny jelly fish that felt like fire, I’m going to check this out. I haven’t noticed it in our local shops.

☆ Also recommended was a “surfer shirt,” comes in short and long sleeve for those really prone to burn.

☆ Another product mentioned was a “Scubadorag,” available at dive shops. I haven’t noticed one before but since I have long hair that has been caught in the snorkel and mask strap so bad I just had to tear it loose, I’m going to check it out. I have a strap cover on my mask, mainly to make my mask easy to pick out of the family’s pile of them, but it doesn’t help on the side where some hair always escapes from the pony tail and gets tangled.

## SPORTS TAPE

➤ Ripeka: Instead of duct tape, I take a roll of sticky sports tape. We have used this for ❶ strapping an injured rolled ankle (very supportive) ❷ strapping together a deep cut on the bottom of a foot which was injured on coral (after flushing it out thoroughly & treating with antibacterial stuff), ❸ taping up broken luggage ❹ holding anything else together or in place. We strapped together a sandal that had come apart, & there would have been no other way to keep the sandal operational for the duration of the holiday. It’s great stuff & so versatile.

➤ Ripeka: We took our own snorkel gear on our cruise to New Caledonia. Unfortunately, my tube had a hole in it; but, good news is that we taped it up with sports tape & it lasted the rest of the trip. Didn’t know whether sports tape would be waterproof enough, but it was. (It looked ugly, but I saved \$40 AUD to borrow P&O's gear.)

## SUNGLASSES

➤ ChrisW: If you don’t have a sunglasses case, store your shades in one of those tube-shaped containers that Crystal Light is sold in. The tubes are just the right size & rigid enough to protect the glasses. Plus, its no great loss if you misplace one.

➤ Dixie54: You need to bring extra sunglasses, but you might bring some cheap, Dollar Store sunglasses as well. Leave these visible in your room so

the attendant uses them to create the “animals” that will adorn your bed when you come back to your room at the end of the day. While I’ve never had an attendant harm my glasses, I’m not taking chances.

## TIPS

- SimpleLife: Save all your change during the months/ weeks prior to the trip. Trade it in for \$1 bills just before you leave to use for extra tips & incidental spending. I had over \$150 last cruise from doing this.
- Kulpn: Tip generously.
- Nekhabet: Tip well. We are just regular income people. So are the people serving you: treat them as you would like to be treated.
- ThePatientOne: Room service is great. A couple of bucks for each delivery works wonders.
- CptSticky: Always tip & sometimes the best time to tip is at the beginning. (How can a tip at the end get you better service?). Don’t forget to tip those you have lots of contact with that are not on your regular “tip list”.
- UppityCats: Most of the main lines are now moving to some form of either pre-paying tips, or letting you pay them on your ship account at the end of the cruise, rather than expecting you to run around on the last day, trying to hunt down everyone & hand them an envelope. But not all are doing the pre-pay — more are billing you at the end of the cruise. But all of them are pretty clear up front what is expected: depending on the cruise line, anywhere from \$10 to \$12 per passenger per day, with some exceptions made on some lines for very young children (2 & under, for example).
- UppityCats: Some folks do tip extra, above the “suggested amount,” if they have a room steward who has been particularly helpful, or a waiter, or bartender — but that is not necessary. Most folks do tip the one who brings a room service order, but of course if you don’t order food to your room, you don’t need to be concerned about that, either. So basically yes, there are some differences among the lines, but all expect that you will somehow tip the very deserving folks who make your cruise special!
- Royal Caribbean International, gratuity guidelines apply to guests of all ages. Gratuities for other service personnel are at your discretion. A 15% gratuity will automatically be added to your bar bill or wine check when you are served.

- ★ Suite attendant: \$5.75-a-day-per-guest
- ★ Stateroom attendant: \$3.50-a-day-per-guest
- ★ Dining Room Waiter: \$3.50-a-day-per-guest
- ★ Assistant Waiter: \$2.00-a-day-per-guest
- ★ Headwaiter: \$.75-a-day-per-guest

## TO DO

- MrsPete: You don't have to take advantage of everything to have fun. Don't feel that you must do an excursion in every port, must buy all the stuff they put out in the promenade, must eat at specialty restaurants, & must have a suit. You can have a great cruise at a more moderate price.
- Barry Mac: Study the ships layout before boarding. The ships aren't just big, some of them are HUGE! The key landmarks you want to get acquainted with before boarding are:
  - ★ Cabin: which deck, side of the ship & side of the aisle,
  - ★ Dining room or other eating spots you'll want to frequent,
  - ★ Gangway (for exiting in port),
  - ★ Elevators & stairwells, and
  - ★ The Purser/Guest Services Office.
- TheGo6Girl: Suck the "marrow" out of the cruise. Go & do the things that might be a little out of your "interest zone," talk to people that talk to you, & try foods that you might not order at home. And most important, leave all of your troubles at the dock. Turn your phone off, do not pick up email (unless its for business), & have the best time!
- GrandBistro: Stay on the ship at least one port day. Its less crowded & some prices are reduced on port days.
- SeaBlu: Every evening my DH & I take a few minutes to walk on the deck & tell each other how happy we are to be there together! Years ago, when we were first married & did not have 2-cents to rub together, did we believe we would ever be on such a beautiful ship, in such a beautiful place, with nothing to do but stroll the deck & gaze at the stars? We are very lucky, these days especially these days it is harder for us to pay for a cruise & all the things that go with it so please, make sure you find the joy in it, not the things to complain about!

➤ Kentucky Girl: Cindy, my Carnival Vacation Planner, sent me a “Tips & Secrets” document before my first cruise. It was the most valuable document on my whole trip. I had her send me an updated list before my last cruise & will again before my next one. I won't start packing without it!

## TOP 5 TIPS

➤ T&DCruisers: ¿If you had to list your top 5 points/tips that you wish you had known before you went on your first cruise what would they be?

➤ DarryDFL:

1. You don't have to do it all.
2. Nobody cares if you've worn that before.
3. An inside cabin saves money. Change clothes, sleep, and get out.
4. Create a packing list, divide packing, follow list, update it.
5. Ask for & learn from advice.

➤ Jetn007: Bring:

1. Good Attitude
2. Large Stack of Money
3. Dancing Shoes
4. Bathing Suit
5. Deck Map of the Ship

➤ UlvaZell: Backpack, backpack, backpack. I use mine as my carry on and as the bag I use in port. I can haul lots of swimsuits, towels, souvenirs and keep my hands free.

## TOURS AT PORTS OF CALL

➤ DireMongoose: Some excursions or limited-space activities do sell out, so if there's something you really have your heart set on doing, book it early.

➤ MrsPete: Research your ports ahead of time, & reserve private excursions. Never take a ship's excursion — the financial savings are nice, but the real perk is the smaller groups.

➤ MaryL: Cruise lines offer packaged side trips at their ports of call. Look for these expeditions online, but you can book directly with the tour companies & save money.

- ErinMarie424: Even a newbie can handle making their own excursion plans. Just do some research & make sure to leave plenty of time to get back. If you end up getting back early, there will be something to do or see at the port.
- GrandBistro: I know the prevailing wisdom is to book your own tours which are significantly less expensive than booking through the ship. But for me, having to arrange, at least sometimes, an additional leg of transportation at a cost, & the anxiety, as unrealistic as it may be, about an unforeseen delay & missing the ship makes the extra \$30 or \$40 worth it, just for my ease of mind. And, it might get included in the ships video log, which I can enjoy on my cabin TV.
- 2Dogs: DO & DON'T
  - ❶ Best bet is to book shore excursions through the ship's staff. That way, if there is a problem returning to the ship, the ship will wait for you.
  - ❷ Don't miss the ship. If you're late, you must pay your own way to the next port of call to catch up with the ship.
  - ❸ Don't think that you must go ashore. There is always plenty to do on the ship.
  - ❹ Do request special massages during shore days because specials are run.
  - ❺ Do look for duty-free items. (Duty means import tax, saving up to 60%.)
  - ❻ Do take 2-way radios for communications in case you get separated.
  - ❼ Make a phone call onshore; not on the ship. Some ships charge \$15-per-minute. Ask the crew where they call when they get on shore or follow the crew members when they get off.
  - ❽ Do have patience. "Someone is going to be first, & someone is going to be last."
- Woan: The biggest thing I wish I knew before going was how over-priced & painful excursions can be. If you are in port for 8 hours, an excursion with a 4-hour bus ride better take you to a location you really want to go. The pre-cruise tips from the cruise company did not mention that there were shuttles to take you to town in most ports where it was not walk distance. Many ports also had fleets of taxi/tour guides that would custom bake you a tour at a fraction of the excursion prices. Also with many excursions they lock you into really poor representation of local food & don't leave you with enough time to venture out on your own to find your own. If I had it to do over again, I would

have not booked any excursions (well, maybe in Brunei as we had a short time in port & taxis are not plentiful).

➤ Calgon1: Break out of the herd. You don't have to go on a shore excursion in every port. Many excursions you can create for yourself by hiring a taxi driver for the day, at a much lower cost than the ship booked excursions. There are some risks involved in doing this, but if You're careful, & research your ports, you wont have any problems. Consider staying on the ship. Indeed, port days can be very relaxing for those choosing this option. There are seldom any lines in the pools, bars, or dining areas. The shops & the spa usually offer really decent price reductions.

➤ GlendaleCruiser: Book early if you are booking on the ship. We booked a week after they opened last year, & the tour we wanted in Croatia was already booked. We are getting together for lunch next week to decide what we will book on ship & we will be watching for the excursions to open up on the website.

## TOWELS

➤ SimpleLife: You don't need to pack beach towels — they are provided.

➤ DarryDFL: Pay attention to how towels are handled. Some ships require you to bring the towels back to the cabin; some require you to exchange them near the pools.

## TV

➤ DarryDFL: On the Freedom of the Seas, I could not hear the cabin TV. Although the cabin steward assured me the volume on the TV could not be increased, a quick visit to the Pursers Desk, & a technician was able to increase it by about 10% — more than enough to be able to hear the CNN Headline News (channel 14). ESPN2 is channel 17. On that ship, all TVs are flat screen — opening up a lot of space on the dressers top.

## VISITORS/COMPANY

➤ Uncle Duck: No company or visitors to my home for one week prior to the cruise. Its hectic enough getting ready without having to deal with people taking my attention away from getting packed.

## WATER

➤ PegEggFL: We bring big plastic cups, & a couple of refillable water bottles (empty). They are light & the water on board seems good. You get ice in your room, plus you have the refrigerator.

➤ GrumpyGramps: I bring 24 bottles of water as my carry-on luggage. Bottled water onboard is \$4.95/bottle. "Too rich for my blood."

➤ Madams77: We brought a 6-pack of water with us on our cruise. We never even opened a single bottle! Ended up leaving it behind when we disembarked. Wont be bringing any water on our next cruise!

➤ JKrossel: Plenty of fluids is a must. Get out & move. We have noticed a lot of ankle swelling on our cruises, too much sit down time, & salt in the food.