

# Cruising 101- And... How to Go For

# *free*

Produced by

*Dancing Moon Travel*  
Pat Hand – 404.735.5775  
Kevin Gragg – 678.459.4646

[www.dancingmoontravel.com](http://www.dancingmoontravel.com)  
[www.cruise-for-free.com](http://www.cruise-for-free.com)

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# Planning Your First Cruise

Maybe you've heard cruise tales from and seen cruise vacation pictures taken by your family and friends. Or maybe you've read in magazines about how much fun (and economical) cruising can be. You've decided...you are ready!! But planning a cruise looks VERY intimidating. You are ready to "*take the plunge*" and go on your first cruise, but where do you start? With so many cruise lines, ships and destinations, how do you plan that first cruise? It can be a challenge for those who either haven't traveled much or who haven't taken an organized tour or vacation.

First-time cruisers should plan to work with a [travel professional](#) experienced in booking cruises. Conduct a "*Google*" search and you can find an "unlimited" number of sites that allow you to book "on-line". Convenient?? Maybe...but I have yet to find a website that is easy to navigate and offers the personal touch and product knowledge offered by a "live" travel professional...especially if you are a "cruise virgin". Before you contact a travel agency, you need to consider a few questions.

## Who Is Going?

The essential first step is to match you with the right cruise product among the hundreds of available options. Your travel agent will need some basic information to get started. Is budget your first consideration are do other issues have top priority? Looking for a romantic get-away? A family vacation? Anniversary? Celebration? A multi-generational family group? All are easily accommodated with a cruise vacation -- everyone from your toddler to your great-aunt Bertha can have a fabulous, memorable vacation. Literally millions of families with teens have discovered that "cruising" is the best family vacation EVER. If you don't have kids or prefer an adults-only environment on your vacation, there are many cruise ships that cater to that preference. Most of today's cruise ships also offer tranquil adults-only retreats – and as added insurance, you might also plan to travel while school is in session.

## **How Much Are You Prepared to Spend?**

Whatever your budget, dollar for dollar, cruising provides one of the best values for your vacation budget. While popularly priced cruises are not technically “all-inclusive” your fare will include your traveling resort delivering you to new exotic locations daily, gourmet quality multi-course meals, some non-alcoholic beverages, room service, and a myriad of entertainment options from splashy Vegas-style production shows to piano bars and pretty much everything in between.

Expenses NOT typically included in the cost of your cruise are gratuities, adult beverages and soft drinks, shore excursions, specialty restaurants, casino, personal shopping expense, and ground transportation to and from the pier. That being said, if you move into the realm of the luxury cruise, and most of these expenses (other than casino & personal shopping) will be included as well.

Comparing the average cost of a cruise to a “regular” vacation, a couple will, on average, save \$1,000 compared to an equivalent land-based vacation. A frequent "rule of thumb" is to budget about \$100/day/person (not including airfare).

The minimum price on a popularly-priced cruise line (Carnival, Royal Caribbean, Norwegian) for a Caribbean cruise can vary greatly depending on factors such as cruise line, length of your cruise, stateroom category selected, and the time of year that you travel. Five-day cruises start at approximately \$350 per person inclusive of fees & taxes, while 7-day cruises begin at around \$550. Book the same cruise at peak season or over a holiday week, and fares can easily double. Still with most of your costs bundled into one low price, cruises provide an excellent vacation value.

## **How Much Time Do You Have?**

If you have less than a week, you are probably be exploring the Bahamas, Mexico, or possibly the Western Caribbean.

7-days will open up the entire Eastern & Western Caribbean to you...AND depending on where you live you could possibly even get to Hawaii or Alaska.

If you can go ten days or more..."the world is your oyster". How about Europe ... Hawaii ... the South Pacific?

## **When Are You Going?**

Some travelers maximize their budget by cruising in the spring or fall. Since kids are in school, and weather can sometimes be uncertain more inventory is generally available. Winter can be considered a "high" season for tropical locations like the Caribbean...however, summertime costs are not far behind due to the large numbers of people who have discovered cruising: families with children, college students, and others that only have summers off. The period January through March is known as "Wave Season" in the travel industry – a popular time for cruising when fares are historically quite attractive.

Some folks are concerned about fall hurricanes, but cruise ships can deal with those by altering their itinerary, although you may see different destinations than what you planned.

If you are going to [Alaska](#) or [northern Europe](#), you can expect to cruise between May and September. If you are going to South America or Antarctica, November through February is the season.

Going to the tropics is a little easier. The temperature will not vary much with the seasons. What does vary is rainfall. The dry season for locations like the [Caribbean](#) and Hawaii is during the summer...rainy season is in the winter. This doesn't necessarily mean it will rain constantly...you just need to be prepared for the possibility of precipitation.

If you are going to the [Mediterranean](#), summer is the peak season, but some ships cruise there year-round.

## **Where Do You Want to Go?**

Choosing a cruise destination is often the most difficult decision for future-cruisers. Go to [Page 13](#) to see some of the options. You can reach every continent and many countries via cruise ship. Even land locked locations such as central Europe, Russia, or the Yangtze River in China can be explored on one of the amazing new [river cruises](#).

## **What Do You Like to Do?**

One of the best things about a cruise is the wide variety of activities available. You can do everything from soaking up the sun on the pool deck to active adventures such as zip-lining, hiking, scuba diving, or other water sports. Tropical destinations feature island tours, shopping, beach and water sports.

European cruises often feature city or museum tours and other cultural attractions. Ships dock in the major cities of Europe for a day or sometimes overnight, and passengers go ashore to see the marvelous historical and cultural sites of the city. Some European cruises include outdoor activities such as hiking, but most focus on the great cities of Europe.

Most cruise lines' will provide a list of shore excursions on their websites...just ask your [travel agent](#). It is not required to reserve shore excursions prior to departure, but it is highly recommended. Some more popular shore excursions do sell out, so if there are activities that are absolute MUST's...don't take chances and book in advance.

## **What Type of Stateroom Do You Want?**

Tough Question. Stateroom selection sometimes is based solely on how much you want to spend. The myriad of options is one of the most confusing parts of booking a cruise for a "first-timer". Not only is there a variety of stateroom categories... location on the ship can make a significant difference in price. [Page 16](#) offers some guidelines.

In many cases, the majority of staterooms on today's new ships feature private [verandahs](#) or balconies. This has resulted in much more reasonable fares on most cabins. In addition, cruise lines frequently offer booking incentives offering balcony staterooms for the price of an oceanview. A

balcony can really enhance your cruise experience -- be sure to have your [travel agent](#) include that option in the quote.

Note for Alaskan cruisers: If you are on a one-way [Alaskan cruise](#), you might want to select a cabin on the shore side. However, the ship's captain will usually turn the ship around in the glacier-laden bays so everyone has an opportunity to see the spectacular scenery from their cabins.

### **Where Do Ships Cruise From and How Do I Get There?**

Most [travel agents](#) can assist you with a convenient "fly-cruise" package. The "fly-cruise" price will usually include [transfers](#) between the ship and the airport, as well as direct transfer of your luggage directly to your stateroom. Most agents encourage clients to travel to the departure city a day early to avoid the stress of worrying about potential flight delays, whether they be weather or mechanical.

Below are ports of [embarkation](#) located in the continental United States.

Boston, MA  
New York, NY  
Bayonne, NJ  
Philadelphia, PA  
Baltimore, MD  
Norfolk, VA  
Charleston, SC  
Jacksonville, FL  
Ft. Lauderdale, FL  
Port Canaveral, FL

Miami, FL  
Galveston, TX  
Mobile, AL  
New Orleans, LA  
Tampa, FL  
Seattle, WA  
San Francisco, CA  
Los Angeles, CA  
San Diego, CA

# Myths About Cruising

Although 13 million people will cruise this year, many other travelers avoid cruises because of one of the myths listed below. Cruising is a wonderful vacation option. Don't let these myths keep you from planning a cruise!

## I Will Get Seasick

Cruises today and seasickness do not really go together. Today most modern cruise ships have stabilizers for passenger comfort should the seas get a bit choppy. In today's technologically savvy world, it is easy for the bridge to know well in advance of any serious storms. Therefore they are able to make the necessary routing changes to offer the passengers the most comfort. If you are concerned about this possible discomfort, simply ask your physician for their suggestions on preventative medication.

## I Will Get a Stomach Virus

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause gastroenteritis. Getting a flu shot will not prevent contracting a norovirus. Noroviruses can be found almost anywhere with lots of people in close proximity. Schools and businesses are also notorious norovirus hotbeds. You can decrease your chance of coming in contact with the Norwalk Virus or norovirus on a cruise ship by washing your hands frequently.

## Cruises Are "All-Inclusive"

Most cruises are NOT considered "all-inclusive" (single price covers lodging, meals, beverages and activities). Cruises ARE very inclusive, but in order to keep the basic price low, most mainstream cruise lines charge for "extras", from soda to wine to bottled water. However, as mentioned on [page 5](#), the basic cruise fare includes all the basic requirements for a fantastic vacation. You are very much in control of your discretionary expenses and can enjoy a great cruise experience with limited out of pocket expenses – just keep an eye on that bar tab! One word of caution – do NOT try to cut expenses by "stiffing" your waiter and room steward. The crew works hard and long to make sure you have a fabulous vacation experience. Unless you have had a very bad experience – which is almost unheard of these days –

cheerfully pay those gratuities. Your steward and wait staff earn them and depend on those tips as providing the largest portion of their income.

## **I Am Told When, Where and With Whom I Dine**

Many cruise ships still feature traditional seating for dinner, with assigned times and tables...usually 6:00pm or 8:30pm. Many regular cruisers prefer this approach as the wait staff quickly learn preferences and it's a great way to make new friends. Although not encouraged, cruisers were allowed to request a new table if the table mates were not the right fit.

However, more and more cruise lines have open seating for dinner, which means you can dine when, where and with whom you like (usually anytime between 6:00 and 10:00) and at different tables. When given a choice, about 75% of cruisers opt for open seating in the main dining room. Since today's cruise ships also include alternative dining venues, you can vary your restaurant choices along with your table mates. Some newer ships have a dozen or more alternative restaurants available nightly.

## **Cruise Ships Are Crowded**

Although a cruise ship with over 3000 passengers can seem crowded at times, it is no more so than most hotels, restaurants, or resorts. One can always find a quiet corner to read a book or have "private" time. Cruise ship managers understand crowd control much like they do at Disney World.

No one loves to stand in lines, and it irritates some cruisers more than others. People often complain about the lines for embarkation, dinner, tenders, and [disembarkation](#). However, these lines are not any worse than you will find at any airport or amusement park in the world. To avoid long lines, avoid disembarking the moment the ramps open at a new port ... or the most popular dining time between 7 & 7:30 pm.

## **Cruise Ships Are Floating Old-Folks Homes**

It is true that many old people (what's old?) go on cruise trips. But what is wrong with traveling with seniors? They have many interesting stories to tell that they are very willing to impart. AND...some "old" people are more active and outgoing than young whippersnappers...just try and keep up. But if you really would rather not travel with many old people on board, look at

the activities offered on board. More sports-oriented activities make it more likely that younger people will be at the ship with you. Also, a good general rule is the longer and more expensive the cruise, the older the passenger.

Today's cruise passengers are a mixed group and the demographics vary greatly from one cruise line to the next. Carnival, Norwegian and Royal Caribbean tend to attract a younger, active set of cruisers – while Cunard and Holland America hold special appeal for more a more “mature” set. A professional travel agent will have no trouble matching you to the perfect cruise line and ship to suit your lifestyle and preferences.

### **Cruise Ships Are Packed With Drunken Party Animals**

Most mainstream cruises are marketed to multi-generational families. Although you will find partiers on a cruise ship, you will also find teetotalers, passengers of all cultures, races, and ages. The one thing all cruisers have in common is a love of travel and having fun, which doesn't necessarily equal wild partying.

### **Cruise Ships Are Boring**

Although this is a common fear of non-cruisers, no one should EVER be bored with cruising. Getting bored would be a VERY difficult task on a cruise. You can be as active (or inactive) as you like. Cruise ship activities range from working out in a high-tech gym to sitting on the deck and reading a book. Perhaps you want to just eat fine food and throw an occasional coin into a slot machine. Or you may go for the gold and take as many shore excursions as you possibly can fit in, attend every party, buffet, and dance the night away.... The options are endless and yours to choose from. Many people actually wish they had MORE days on the ship...to enjoy all the activities and facilities available.

Many cruise ships spend the entire day in port, so you can explore all the fascinating parts of the world. The biggest advantage of a cruise is, you unpack once and visit numerous exotic ports, without having to live out of a suitcase! While you're enjoying your gourmet dinner, relaxing with a glass of wine on your private verandah -- or just catching up with some Z's – the ship takes you to your next destination. Imagine...cruisers will visit 3 or 4 charming Caribbean islands in just one week. Try doing that any other way!!

## **I Have To “Dress-Up” For Dinner**

At one time, most cruises had two or three formal nights with a required dress code of tuxedos for the men and gowns for the ladies. But times have changed, and the cruise lines have become far less strict with their wardrobe requirements. Some lines have completely abolished formal nights, while others have dubbed them as “optional for those who choose to indulge.”

## **I’ll Be “Out-Of-Touch” With The World**

It used to be when on a cruise ship there were no newspapers, telephone calls were \$15 a minute and cell phones, texting and Internet didn’t exist. Just like dress codes...times have changed. Every mainstream cruise ship has 24-hour service compatible with any cell phone...and wireless Internet access is available ship-wide. Most cruises will also deliver a passengers' favorite newspapers to their room every morning. Of course, none of this is free; satellite communication is required, but the services are available for a reasonable price.

## **Cruise Ship Entertainment is Lame**

Again...go back 15-20 years and you would probably be right. But thankfully, cruise ship entertainment has improved significantly in the last decade. NCL gets kudos for hiring proven entertainment companies like Second City Comedy from Chicago, Legends in Concert from Las Vegas and the great Blue Man Group from New York City. Royal Caribbean has featured full Broadway versions of Hairspray, Saturday Night Fever and Chicago the Musical on its larger ships.

In addition to the main show in the showroom there are usually many other events taking place to enjoy. There are always several lounges that offer music, karaoke, entertainment and dancing to choose from. Disney, Royal Caribbean, Costa, Cunard and Princess ships now have state-of-the-art 3D movie theaters offering first-run films. Of course all the entertainment on board the ship is included in the cruise fare.

# Where Can I Go?

Maybe the question is better stated as, “Where CAN’T I Go?” One of the most important elements of a cruise is the itinerary and the destinations or ports of call. With over 75 percent of the earth covered with water, it is not surprising that you can cruise all of the continents of the world. We’ll highlight the destinations of Africa, Antarctica, Asia, Australia, Bahamas, Bermuda, Eastern Canada, Europe, Hawaii, Panama Canal, South America, and the South Pacific. We’ll go a little more in-depth with the two most popular cruise destinations...Alaska and the Caribbean.

- **Africa** - Cape Town, Cairo, the Nile River, Luxor, and Morocco. Also day or overnight safaris that can be incorporated into many African cruises. Don’t forget a [Nile River Cruise](#).
- **Antarctica**
- **South, East and Southeastern Asia** –China, Japan, Vietnam, Bangkok, and Singapore. A [river cruise](#) down the Yangtze River in China is a popular vacation.
- **Southwest Asia** – Visit the ancient desert city of Petra in Jordan, go to the Egyptian resort area of Sharm el-Sheikh on the Red Sea, or take a full day bus excursion to see St. Catherine's Monastery. It is the celebrated site of the burning bush where God spoke to Moses.
- **Australia and New Zealand**
- **Bermuda** – Ports of Call...Hamilton and St. George
- **Southern Europe** - Including the Spanish and Portuguese islands of the Atlantic, Portugal, western and northern France, southwest Spain, and Gibraltar
- **Northern Europe** - Netherlands, Belgium, the British Isles, northern France, and the Norwegian fjords
- **Baltic Sea** - Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Latvia, Estonia, Germany, Poland, and Russia
- **Western Mediterranean** – Barcelona, Spain; Cannes, France; Florence, Italy; Monaco and Monte Carlo
- **Eastern Mediterranean** – Venice, Italy; Dubrovnik, Croatia; Greece; Turkey
- **European River Cruises** - [Cruise the great rivers of Europe, including the Danube, Rhine, Main, Seine, and Volga](#)
- **Hawaii**

- **Mexico**
- **Panama Canal**
- **South America** - Devil's Island, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, and the Galapagos Islands
- **South Pacific** - Tahiti, Moorea, Bora Bora, the Tuamotus, and the Marquesas

## **The Caribbean**

Caribbean cruises remain the most popular cruise destination for travelers. Choosing where to sail - the eastern or western Caribbean - is one of the first decisions made when planning a Caribbean cruise vacation. For beginner cruisers, the most common cruise is a 7-day Caribbean cruise. The most common itineraries are Eastern Caribbean and Western Caribbean. Which is better? Both! Both itineraries provide cruisers with opportunities to sail, swim, snorkel, and shop. But there are differences.

### **Eastern Caribbean Cruises**

Most cruise ships sailing to the Eastern Caribbean on 7-day itineraries embark from Florida. Ports of call on an Eastern Caribbean itinerary often include the **Bahamas, St. Thomas, St. John (USVI), Puerto Rico, and perhaps St. Maarten/St. Martin**. If you want less time at sea and more beach time, then an Eastern Caribbean itinerary might appeal more to you. The islands are relatively close together, smaller, and shore excursions tend to be more geared to beach or water activities.

### **Western Caribbean Cruises**

Cruise ships sailing to the western Caribbean embark from Florida, New Orleans or Texas. Ports of call on a Western Caribbean itinerary often include **Cozumel or Playa del Carmen, Mexico; Grand Cayman; Key West, FL; the Dominican Republic; Jamaica; Belize; or Costa Rica**. The ports of call are further apart, so more time at sea is usually involved. So you may have less time in port or on the beach. The ports of call in the western Caribbean are sometimes on the mainland (Mexico, Belize, Costa Rica) or at larger islands (Jamaica, Dominican Republic). Therefore, the shore excursion options are more varied. You can explore ancient Mayan ruins, hike the rain forests, or go snorkeling or SCUBA diving in some unforgettable locations.

## Alaska

Alaska has been a cruise lovers' favorite for many years, and most cruise ships use one of two basic Alaska cruise itineraries. Many cities and sites are inaccessible by road and a cruise ship provides passengers with a view of many natural wonders that cannot be seen from land. Over 750,000 cruise passengers will sail Alaskan waters during the short 5 month cruise season.

**Two Basic Itineraries to Alaska** - When planning your Alaska cruise, you will have two basic itineraries to choose from:

- **Inside Passage** - Sail roundtrip from Vancouver or Seattle to the southeast panhandle of Alaska. Cruises usually include famous Glacier Bay National Park. Sailing roundtrip often makes your airfare cheaper since you embark and disembark in the same port.
- **Gulf of Alaska** - Sailing north from Vancouver, the south central coast of Alaska is added to the **Inside Passage**. Ships sail one-way between Vancouver and Seward, the closest port to Anchorage. Your embarkation and disembarkation points are different, but you have the opportunity to see much more of Alaska's spectacular scenery, including the glacier-clad Gulf of Alaska and the Hubbard Glacier.

If you want to make the most of your Alaskan adventure, opt for the cruise-tour. These packages can last anywhere from a couple of days to over a week, and include visits to the amazing Alaska interior, such as Denali National Park, home of Mt. McKinley. When planning your cruise, strongly consider staying a few extra days to experience more of our last true wilderness. You will likely be surprised at how affordable this tour can be.

# Choosing a Stateroom on a Cruise Ship

## What Category of Cruise Ship Stateroom Is Best for You?

As you now gathered, planning a cruise vacation involves many decisions. One of the most difficult is choosing your [stateroom](#) type and location. The options can be overwhelming to the inexperienced. Some ships have over 20 different combinations!

Many people suggest booking the cheapest stateroom available since “you won’t be spending much time in there anyway”. Many more people would disagree. If you are enjoying a 7-day or longer cruise, you might want to simply “get away from it all” and relax in your room. Enjoy television, read a book, or just simply take a nap. Also...the cheapest stateroom available means not having a window or balcony. Can you say claustrophobia? Savoring a glass of wine on your private balcony at a sunset sail-away makes for an unforgettable cruise experience. Imagine yourself with your favorite book, a cold beverage, and breathing the fresh sea air— these experiences truly differentiate cruising from a land-locked resort vacation.

On a cruise ship, your stateroom is the one place you can get away from EVERYTHING and EVERYBODY. We are all different, and this sort of quiet retreat time might well be a major priority to you.

## Budget

Price of course is a consideration for all of us. Some cruisers prefer going on more cruises by staying in an inside stateroom and reducing costs. Others see their vacation as a special, relaxing and necessary part of their life and are willing to pay more to get the stateroom suited to their situation.

A balcony (veranda) could cost from 25% to 100% more than the price of an inside stateroom. The best advice is to learn about cruise ship staterooms and with the assistance of your [travel agent](#), select the room best suited for you and your budget. Keep in mind a stateroom with a balcony is sometimes actually smaller than those with just a window...the balcony is replacing the inside space. It truly comes down to personal choice...space, balcony, cost savings...all make the decision a difficult one.

## **Types of Cruise Ship Staterooms**

Not only does price differ on the “type” of stateroom...but “location” plays a part as well. Stateroom options on large mainstream cruise ships are normally listed as:

- Standard Inside
- Ocean View
- Balconied
- Suite

The smallest stateroom on a “luxury” cruise ship might be larger than one on a “mainstream” cruise ship. The quality of accommodations is one of the biggest differences between cruise lines. Stateroom and balcony size and location can vary significantly and still be in the same price range.

Now you can see why this is such a difficult decision. We’ll try to outline the options here...but the best option is to consult with your [travel/cruise professional](#).

### **Standard Cruise Ship Staterooms - Inside Staterooms (No Porthole or Window)**

Many cruise ships today have standard staterooms of similar size and amenities, with location determining the price differential. The least expensive, inside standard stateroom on a mainstream cruise ship run from about 120 to 180 sq/ft. The staterooms usually have twin beds that can be pushed together to make a queen-sized bed. The staterooms have wall-to-wall carpeting, individually controlled air conditioning/heating, dresser or storage space, closet, telephone, and satellite television. The staterooms also usually have a night table, reading lamps, and a chair. Some standard staterooms feature personal safes, table, desk with chair, convertible loveseat, mini-refrigerator, and even Internet access.

The standard bathroom is usually tiny and most likely only has a shower (no tub). The shower usually has good water pressure, with the only complaint being the small size...some say it’s like showering in a phone booth. The bathroom also has a sink, toiletry shelves, and a noisy vacuum toilet like on an airplane.

## **Standard Cruise Ship Staterooms - Outside Ocean View Cabins (Porthole or Window)**

The ocean view standard cabins and the inside standard cabins are usually identical in size and layout. The only difference is the window. Most modern ships have large picture windows rather than portholes, but these windows cannot be opened. So, if you want to have a sea breeze in your room, you will need to get a balcony. However, some ships have both porthole staterooms...they are usually on the lowest decks and are less expensive. About the only view you have from a porthole is whether it is daylight or dark.

## **Staterooms with Balconies or Verandas**

The step above an outside cabin is one with a balcony (veranda). These cabins have sliding glass doors, giving you private access to the outdoors. Almost all provide a seating area with a small sofa and table. Balconies accommodate two chairs and a small table. Many ships feature expanded rear-facing balconies at the back of the ship.

## **Suites**

A "suite" can mean several things depending on the cruise line. It may simply have a small sitting area with a curtain to separate the bed from the sitting area. Or it may have an entirely separate bedroom. It's important to ask your [travel professional](#) and look at cabin layouts before booking. Suites always have balconies, are larger, and many have bigger bathrooms with tubs. Most offer enhanced amenities – some with concierge and butler service – and are a wonderful indulgence, especially if you are celebrating a special occasion, have a lot of seas days or want to spend a lot of time together in your cabin. Some luxury lines have all of their cabins as mini-suites or suites.

## **Stateroom Location**

### **Lower Deck Stateroom**

The inside cabins on the lowest decks are usually the least expensive accommodations. The lower deck will give you a smoother ride in rough seas, but they are the furthest from the common areas such as the pool and lounges. Even though standard inside staterooms are all the same size and layout on a ship, you can save a few hundred dollars by choosing to be on a lower deck. The same applies for standard ocean view staterooms, but inquire about the size of the window, since the lower deck ocean views

might only have portholes. Two problems that you might experience with staterooms on the lower decks are engine noise and anchor noise. If your stateroom is near the front of the ship, it can sound like the ship has hit a coral reef when the anchor is dropped. Newer ships tend to have less engine noise and their stabilizers suppress the ship's motion, but you will still get that anchor noise a couple of times a day!

### **Higher Deck Stateooms**

Staterooms on the upper decks usually cost more than those on the lower decks since they are conveniently located nearer the pool and sun decks. However, you may be more aware of the ship's motion on upper decks, so those who are seasick prone might want to consider a mid-ship stateroom on a lower deck.

### **Midship Staterooms**

Sometimes midship standard staterooms are a good choice due to their central location and less motion. They are excellent for those who have mobility problems or who are motion sensitive. However, they can have more traffic outside in the hallways since other passengers will often be passing by. Some cruise ships charge slightly more for midship staterooms or even have them in a separate category. Again, be sure to check out a deck plan and find the location of the [tenders](#) or lifeboats. They can block your view and be noisy when raised or lowered. Most cruise lines will tell you if a cabin has a blocked or limited view, but it is wise to check for yourself.

### **Bow (Forward) Staterooms**

Staterooms on the front of the ship get the most motion and appeal to those who relate themselves to Leonardo DiCaprio or Kate Winslet. You will experience more wind and spray on your forward balcony. In rough seas, a bow stateroom can definitely be exciting! Note that the windows on staterooms on the front are sometimes smaller and recessed, meaning you can't see as much as you might on the side or rear of the ship. Cruise ships often put suites on the front of the ships to take advantage of the unusual shape and opportunity to provide the passengers with larger balconies.

### **Aft (Rear) Staterooms**

If you want a large balcony, look to the rear of the ship. These staterooms also provide an amazing view of where you have just sailed. Staterooms in the [aft](#) of the ship have more motion than centrally located cabins, but less than those forward. One disadvantage--depending on the shape of the ship,

sometimes passengers in the lounges or restaurants can look down on the balconies of the aft cabins.

If all of this information is confusing...don't worry...it just means you are normal. When planning your next cruise, study the layout and architecture of the ship's deck plans before selecting your stateroom. Query your [travel professional](#) and others who have sailed the ship. Think about what is important to you and consider the cost differential. If your vacation time is limited, you might want to spend a few more dollars for a better stateroom.



# Inquiring Minds Want to Know

Here we'll try to cover any miscellaneous questions commonly asked.

## Will I Save Money if I Book at the Last Minute?

Not generally...actually many cruise lines offer incentives in the form of lower prices and stateroom upgrades for EARLY planners. On a cruise if you focus on the cheapest price...you can pretty much be guaranteed a less enjoyable vacation. Cruise pricing is based on "supply and demand". For example, a Christmas family cruise needs to be booked well in advance...and discounts are rare. However, sail Caribbean during the fall and you can find tremendous bargains.

## Will I Need a Passport?

You may well need a Passport and/or proof of citizenship depending on your cruise destination and ports of call. Currently, Caribbean cruises sailing roundtrip from the same port still do not require a passport, and you can sail with a state-issued photo ID along with a certified copy of your birth certificate. Most Alaska cruises will require a passport. A passport is always the "gold standard" and highly recommended for cruise travel. Ask you [travel professional](#) for assistance in determining the documentation you will need.

## I've Heard There Are Ways to Receive Stateroom Upgrades?

It's important to remember that there's no magic, secret, or guaranteed way to get an upgraded stateroom. However, there are a few things you can try to improve your chances of getting an upgrade.

- Book the cruise early
- Be a frequent cruiser
- Be a first-time cruiser
- Book a "[Guarantee](#)" stateroom
- Monitor prices after you've booked
- If you experience a problem, report it early and professionally
- Book a "sold-out" stateroom category

- And...as always, ask your [travel professional](#). The travel agent might know from past experience which cruise lines, cruise ships, and cruise itineraries are more likely to upgrade.

### **What is a “Guarantee” Stateroom?**

Booking a "guarantee" stateroom means you are only reserving a particular category, not a specific stateroom. The "guarantee" from the cruise line is that you will get the category you have reserved or a higher one. The disadvantage of a guarantee cabin is that you might not get the specific area of the ship you prefer (or even the specific deck). The advantage is that you will be more likely to get an upgrade than someone who has booked a specific cabin since the cruise line will not have to ask you before the upgrade. You are taking a chance and leaving it up to the cruise line to assign you a stateroom in a given category. Be sure to do your research before you book a "guarantee" stateroom (or any stateroom). You might be delighted in the value for get for your dollar, but you might also be disappointed if other staterooms in the same category are in much better locations. When reviewing deck plans be sure to check out what is above, below, or next to your cabin. Imagine how noisy a cabin can be that is located under a dance floor! Also, an ocean view stateroom on a [promenade deck](#) will have lots of foot traffic going by.

### **Are There Laundry Facilities?**

Laundry, cleaning and pressing services are always available. Each stateroom will be have a laundry list and bag to use if you should need this taken care of. Additionally, some ships have self-service laundry facilities for passenger use. They are equipped with washers, dryers, ironing boards, irons and detergent for purchase. The washers and dryers are generally coin operated.

### **What Are The Rules Regarding Smoking?**

Tough question...it really varies from cruise line to cruise line. Here we'll outline a few of the rules on the more mainstream cruise lines. Please keep in mind these rules are changing almost daily. If you must smoke while on a cruise...ask your [travel professional](#) for the most up-to-date rules.

### **Carnival Cruise Lines**

Where You Can Smoke: Smoking is permitted in casinos, dance clubs, piano bars and other live music venues, as well as designated areas on open decks. Smoking is prohibited in spa cabins on Carnival Splendor and Carnival Dream. Where You Can't: All dining areas are non-smoking, as are a number of public rooms, including the aft cabaret lounge, main show lounge, library, and along the promenade. Cigar and Pipe Smoking: Ships in Carnival's Destiny and Conquest classes have cigar bars.

### **Celebrity Cruises**

Where You Can Smoke: Cigarette smoking is only permitted in designated indoor and outdoor areas. Examples include the port side of the pool deck and sundecks on each ship; the port side of the Sunset Bar on Celebrity Century and on Celebrity's Millennium class of ships; and the port side, aft, outside of Winter Garden on Celebrity Galaxy and Celebrity Mercury. Where You Can't: Smoking is prohibited in cabins and on balconies. Also, smoking is not permitted in any dining venue, casino, theater, hallway, elevator or corridor. On Celebrity's new Solstice, the Lawn Club and the Sunset Bar at the Lawn Club will not allow smoking. Cigar and Pipe Smoking: Cigar and pipe smoking is allowed only in specially designated sections of the open decks.

### **Disney Cruises**

Where You Can Smoke: Smoking is permitted on the starboard side of all open decks (except near Mickey's Pool) and cabin balconies. Where You Can't: Smoking is prohibited in all indoor areas, including cabins.

### **Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL)**

Where You Can Smoke: Smoking is permitted in cabins, on open decks, and in casinos and cigar bars. Where You Can't: All indoor public areas except casinos and cigar bars are non-smoking.

### **Princess Cruises**

Where You Can Smoke: Smoking is permitted in cabins, including balconies, on the open decks and in designated areas in most public rooms. Where You Can't: Smoking is prohibited in show lounges, elevators, dining rooms and all food service areas. Cigar and Pipe Smoking: Cigar and pipe smoking is permitted only on the open decks.

## **Is Cruising Safe?**

During the past two decades, North American cruise lines have earned the best safety record in the travel industry, according to CLIA, the Cruise Lines International Association. Your luggage and carry-on bags will be screened before you board, and highly trained onboard security personnel monitor the ship 24/7.

## **Can We Bring Our Kids? What About Infants?**

From toddling two-year-olds to free-spirited teens, kids love to cruise--and parents love to see those smiles on vacation. Cruise lines catering to families have free, comprehensive kids programs, many of which begin with babysitting services for infants (additional fee) and go all the way up to high school. Most cruise lines have minimum age requirement of six months for infants (may be increased to 12 months for long or trans-oceanic journeys).

## **Do I Need to Tip on a Cruise Ship?**

Tipping practices vary greatly amongst the cruise lines today, ranging from a required added service charge to no tipping at all. It is very important that you know the policy of the cruise line before you cruise so you can budget accordingly. When planning your cruise, check with your [travel agent](#). Often the recommended tips, which run from about \$10 to \$15 per passenger per day, are published in the cruise brochure or on the cruise line Web page. The cruise director will also remind passengers about how much and who the cruise line recommends you tip.

Most tips on cruise ships are considered “service charges”, which is one of the reasons why cruise lines seem to be moving towards adding a flat fee to your onboard account rather than make the tip amount entirely optional. Most cruise lines do not pay their service staff a very large wage, and tips or service charges make up much of their compensation. In order to keep the advertised price down, passengers are expected to subsidize the service staff through service charges or tips.

Cruise lines have moved away from traditional tipping for two reasons. First, as cruising has become more international, cruise lines recognized that many passengers from western Europe and the Far East were not accustomed to tipping. It was easier to just add a service charge to the bill (as is done in

most hotels in Europe) than to educate the passengers. Second, many large cruise ships have added multiple alternative dining rooms and have moved away from fixed seating times and tables. Passengers have different wait staff each evening, which makes tipping more problematic. Adding a service charge to be split amongst all the wait staff is easier for all.

One of the things most people love about cruising is the excellent service and wonderful attitude of the crew. Most cruisers believe the crew deserves at least the recommended service/tipping charge.

### **What If I Require a Special Diet?**

Be sure to let your [travel professional](#) know if you have special dietary needs so they can make arrangements for you in advance. Even if the cruise line was not notified, they will prepare meals around whatever special dietary needs you have.

### **Do I HAVE To Play Shuffleboard??**

Yes...all passengers on all cruise ships are required to play at least one game of shuffleboard or be subjected to huge fines. (Sorry...couldn't help myself...I had to inject a little "cruise" humor)



# **Popular Ships – *Condé Nast* 2011**

## **Readers' Poll: The Top 80 Cruise Ships in the World**

Published [February 2011](#)

*Condé Nast Traveler's* eleventh annual list of the very best passenger ships—as elected by their readers.

An impressive 13 million people boarded cruise ships last year, 70 percent of them Americans. This is the eleventh annual list of the very best passenger ships, reflecting the votes of thousands of *Condé Nast Traveler* readers who participated in the annual Readers' Choice Survey. Here are your top-scoring ships in four categories, including—new this year—the finest in [riverboats](#). Anchors aweigh!

[CLICK HERE](#) for the full report

# Don't Call it a "Boat"!!

## A Cruisers Vocabulary

**Aft:** The back end of the ship. Hint: First, visit the [Fore](#) of the ship. **Aft-er** that, be sure to check out the back, or aft end.

**Astern:** Toward the rear (aft) of the ship; behind the stern (rear) of the ship

**Azipod Propulsion:** Ships powered by Azipod propulsion are a bit more maneuverable and much quieter than older propeller-driven ships.

**Balcony/Verandah:** Some outside staterooms (and most suites) have a balcony or veranda where you can sun and sight-see in relative privacy. Often available for as little as \$15/day extra, many cruisers consider this a vital upgrade--especially in places like Alaska where the scenery never stops.

**Berth:** The dock, quay, or pier where a cruise ship ties up to the shore; the bed or beds in the passenger cabins on the ship.

**Bilge:** The interior of the ship's hull below the floor; the area between the floor (deck) of a ship and the ship's hull.

**Bow:** Towards the front or forward position of a ship

**Bridge:** The area of the ship where steering and navigation are controlled. Sometimes a scheduled tour of the bridge area will be offered--check the daily activity listings for times.

**Bulkhead:** A wall separating cabins or compartments on a ship; vertical partitions that separate watertight compartments on a ship.

**Cabin:** A sleeping compartment or room on a cruise ship. Also known as stateroom.

**Captain:** The captain is the highest level officer on a cruise ship. He/she is responsible for steering the ship or directing others who drive it. The captain is the ultimate commander on a ship, and all the officers and high-level civilians such as the hotel director act under his direction.

**Companionway:** An interior stairway on a ship

**Cruise Director:** The cruise director is responsible for all activities and entertainment onboard the ship. He or she usually also serves as the emcee for the evening shows and for some of the programs throughout the day. The cruise director often reports directly to the hotel manager/director.

**Cruise to Nowhere:** A cruise spent entirely at sea in international waters, with no stops in port.

**Disembarkation:** Cruise-speak for getting off the ship.

**Embarkation:** Cruise-speak for getting on the ship.

**Fantail:** The rear or aft overhang of a cruise ship. The area after the end of the main deck.

**Fore:** The part of the ship that's in front as you face forward. Opposite the Aft end.

**Fun:** Going on a cruise.

**Gangway:** The opening in the side of a ship used to embark and disembark; the ramp used to enter or exit the cruise ship

**Galley:** The ship's kitchen, where all dining-room meals are prepared.

**Helm:** The wheel, stick, or tiller controlling the rudder of the ship.

**Hotel Manager:** The hotel manager on a ship is in charge of all of the hotel operations, including housekeeping, the restaurants, bars, and other passenger services.

**Inside Passage:** The Inside Passage is a protected sea route along the western coast of North America. The Inside Passage stretches for about 950 miles (1530 km) from Seattle, Washington, along the coast of British Columbia and to the northern part of the Alaska panhandle at Skagway, Alaska.

Cruise ships often sail the Inside Passage because the waters are calm, the scenery spectacular, and the ports interesting. Cruises embarking in Seattle

or Vancouver and visiting ports such as Juneau, Ketchikan, and Skagway are considered "Inside Passage" cruises.

**Inside Stateroom:** A cabin with no windows facing the outside. Generally less expensive than an outside cabin.

**Internet Café:** More and more common on board ships, Internet cafés offer computers allowing you to surf the net and send e-mail. Prices are steep, but often less expensive than placing a ship-to-shore telephone call.

**Leeward:** The side of the ship away from the wind; the direction away from the wind

**Midnight Buffet:** It's not always at midnight (on some ships, you only have to stay awake until 11:30 or so), but most ships offer a midnight buffet. As a matter of fact, most ships now offer some form of dining--or at least room service--around the clock, ensuring you never have to go hungry onboard.

**Mustert Drill:** Also known as the lifeboat drill, every cruise ship holds this safety drill at the beginning of a cruise. It may seem silly, but you'll find out which lifeboat is yours in the (extremely unlikely) event of an emergency. Plus, it's mandatory! There will be instructions in your cabin telling you where to report for your drill, and announcements telling you when.

**Nautical Mile:** One minute of latitude or 6,076 feet; about 1/8 longer than a land mile of 5,280 feet

**Oceanview:** All outside cabins have windows, but if your stateroom is called an oceanview, you can be sure there will be no beams or lifeboats obstructing your view.

**Outside Stateroom:** A cabin with a window that faces outward (as opposed to a stateroom located inside the ship). Usually synonymous with an oceanview stateroom, however some outside cabins have partially blocked views.

**Port:** The left side of a ship, facing forward. It's easy to keep port and starboard straight if you notice that "port" and "left" have the same number of letters.

**Promenade:** An open deck around the outside of a ship that usually encircles the entire ship.

**Purser:** The Purser's Desk is a combination bank/post office/information booth/lost-and-found/authority on customs and immigration, and safe deposit trustee. Usually open 24 hours for all your information needs.

**Shore Excursion:** Any organized trip to shore is a shore excursion. Virtually every ship has a shore excursion desk set up to help passengers plan their activities. You don't have to be signed up for an excursion to get off the ship when it's in port, but because ports aren't always near tourist areas, it's a good idea. Shore excursions vary widely by cruise line and destination, but they can range from a quick and inexpensive bus tour of a city to an Alaskan glacier trek, guided visits to European cathedrals, or excursions to private Caribbean beaches.

**Shore Excursion Director:** Responsible for managing the land tours on a cruise ship; usually reports to the cruise director

**Starboard:** The right side of a ship as you face forward. So called because in the olden days, English ships traditionally had a sort of a rudder, or "steerboard" hanging off the right side, and so....actually, we can never remember that story. Probably the best way to remember which side is starboard is to remember that port is the left side.

**Stateroom:** A cruise-ship cabin. Staterooms come in two basic styles: Inside, and Outside, although on any ship you will find subdivisions within each category. Some outside staterooms have Balconies, or Oceanviews, for instance, while slightly less expensive room will not.

**Suite:** Suites are larger than the average stateroom, normally including more than one room. They sometimes also offer luxurious touches like floor-to-ceiling windows, hot tubs, entertainment systems--even a butler!

**Tender:** Most ports that cruise ships call on have large enough docks and deep enough harbors that the ship can discharge passengers directly onto the dock. A few smaller ports, however, can't accommodate today's mega-ships. In this case, small boats, called tenders, ferry passengers from the ship to the dock.

**Transfer:** A ride offered by the cruise line to the cruise-ship terminal from either the airport or your hotel. Also available after your cruise to take you back to the airport or a hotel.

**Travel Agent:** A true [professional](#) that takes the worry out of planning your cruise holiday.

**Verandah:** Open air balcony outside a cruise ship cabin reached via a sliding glass door or French doors

**Wait...Don't Go  
Anywhere...We've  
Saved The Best  
Chapter For Last!!**



## **Yes...You CAN Go on a Cruise for FREE**

Ok...now you know everything there is to know about going on a fabulous cruise. Well...not really. But hopefully this guide had cleared up at least a few questions for you.

Now...how would you like to experience the fantastic service, the gourmet dining, the Vegas style entertainment, the exotic ports that are all part of the cruise experience...for absolutely **NO COST!!**

*Dancing Moon Travel* can produce a special “*Get-Away at Sea*” for any group or organization. Whether a corporate retreat, convention, family/school reunion, seminar, club, etc....*Dancing Moon Travel* can coordinate a seamless function with amenities and services customized exclusively for the group.

**As the group organizer...you quite likely will qualify to sail for FREE!!**

If an event can be held on land...it almost assuredly can be arranged at sea! Don't settle for a stuffy hotel venue when you can conduct, customized gatherings in total comfort while enjoying all the benefits found on a phenomenal cruise ship.

- Private conference areas for meetings, training, networking or other functions
- Special amenities such as a welcome cocktail party with open bar, group photograph, wine/canapés for each stateroom.
- Seamless event including pre-cruise lodging, ground transfers and even private shore excursions.
- Customize the cruise to meet the desires of your group. Want something unique and special? Just ask...we'll do our best to make it happen!
- Raise funds for your organization.

**Don't forget. As group organizer...you quite likely will qualify to sail for FREE!**

## What Kind of Groups Qualify?

Groups of any type...from 25 people to 500...are candidates for the *Dancing Moon Travel* "Get-Away at Sea" program. Here are a few examples of groups we might work with:

- Family Reunions
- Corporate Retreats
- Churches and Sunday School Groups
- Charitable and Fundraising Groups
- Cigar Aficionados
- Political Organizations
- Bird Watchers
- Senior Citizen Groups
- School/Class Reunions
- Writer Workshops
- Networking Organizations
- Photographers
- Clubs & Hobbyists
- Culinary & Wine Enthusiasts
- Fraternal & Civic Organizations
- The list goes on and on and on and on and on and on...

## How to Apply

*Dancing Moon Travel* accepts applications for customized group with projected sail dates of 7-12 months in the future.

To see if your group qualifies...and if you might be eligible for a **FREE** cruise...visit

<http://www.cruise-for-free.com>

**Dancing Moon Travel** is a customer focused; service oriented travel agency dedicated exclusively to the needs of the leisure traveler. We specialize in producing a customized “Get-Away at Sea” for groups and organizations. We value our clients and hope to book not only the trip you are planning today but also your next vacation, and then the next! Contact us about your travel needs today - if you are not already a Dancing Moon client, we hope to earn your business soon!

*Dancing Moon Travel*  
**Pat Hand – 404.735.5775**  
**Kevin Gragg – 678.459.4646**

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TRAVEL**