



Q: We'll soon be taking our first cruise, and before we decide, we'd like your opinion. How do we get the best deal, by booking through the internet or the travel agency in our hometown?

*Submitted by Mr. and Mrs. J.C. Clarke*

A: The quick answer is that both can get you good deals, if you shop around thoroughly before committing to a specific cruise. We often book flights and hotel visits with our favorite online agency. It's instant and the least hassle. However, because you're planning to take your first cruise, we recommend you do it through your friendly, in-person neighborhood travel agent.

An advantage of when you confer with your local expert could be that you may luck out on an exclusive discount and/or free on-board extras the cruise lines often offer exclusively to travel agencies. More important, because this is your maiden voyage, you'll have to deal with all kinds of confusing complications, especially if you'll be flying to the port city and require overnight hotel reservations, taxis and other services. To ease your way, you may prefer to speak with a live person for back-and-forth questions and answers about all aspects of the land and sea journey.

Bon Voyage!