



Q: I see frequent ads about big last-minute bargains for unsold cabins on cruises. Are they actually big discounts? *LMMcC, Boston MA*

A: Yes, if your timing and luck are right. Chances are best if you deal directly with the cruise line or a long-trusted travel agency rep. Cruise ships must sail on schedule, whether all cabins are sold or not. Empty cabins mean lost revenue. Additionally, it also means fewer passengers to buy drinks, gifts, spas, shore excursions and gamble in onboard casinos. Especially in off-seasons, such as in January right after the year-end holidays, there are often real last-minute bargains. When sailing time approaches and not all cabins are sold, the cruise line may first contact already-booked passengers. They're offered bargain upgrades to better cabins and suites, often at savings at as much as 50 percent.

This action results in the lower-priced, less-desirable cabins to be available. They're usually the ones offered in last-minute deals at similarly reduced pricing. Unsold cabins typically are put on sale within 90 days of sailing.

The best deals are during winter, when travelers are less inclined to cruise, and more empty cabins happen. The advantage to the savvy senior traveler is to be flexible with cruise plans, and keep in frequent contact with your travel agent, the cruise line and do daily scanning of internet cruise promotions.

Several websites dealing specifically with last-minute cruises are www.bestpricecruises.com and www.lastminutecruises.com