



Q: We like to gamble in Las Vegas, and enjoy playing video poker. On our most recent visit, we actually went home winners. We plan a Bahamas cruise next month, and we'd like to play video poker in the ship's casino. A friend told us all cruise ship slot machines are rigged, and we'd just be throwing our money away. Is that true? *BLD, Baltimore MD*

A: On any casino slot machine, the odds strongly favor the house. Like any other business, it's set to take in more money than it hands out. However, your friend may be right about cruise ship casino slots.

In Las Vegas, all machines are regularly monitored by reps of the state of Nevada. They must be electronically set to pay back a certain amount, usually from about 80 to 90 percent of money taken in.

Cruise ships are internationally registered, and their slot machines are not regulated. Of course, there's always the teeny chance you'll hit a big jackpot. We suggest you start where you can bet a penny on up to \$1 per spin.

Then, if they're obviously just taking your money, make a limit of \$10 or \$20 to lose, and play awhile for fun. Cruises should be much more than hanging around inside the casino. Get out into the sun, pool, spa, ocean views, shore excursions and all the other fun features.