

Q: Our travel agent said it would only cost another \$25 a night if we booked a balcony cabin on our next cruise. However, the cruise is for 14 days. That's another \$350. Is it worth the extra cost?



A: Looking out at the ocean by day and by moonlight is great from your own private balcony. And watching the full panorama of arrivals and departures in harbors are wonderful cruise experiences. If airfare and your two-week cruise already costs you \$4,000 or more, it is well worth the extra cost for a balcony cabin. Additionally, balcony accommodations are usually suites with much more living space inside than basic cabins.

On the other hand, with today's economy hitting cruise lines hard, including too many empty cabins on cruises, ask your travel agent if you can be bumped up to a balcony cabin at less cost or no cost at all. If that doesn't happen, when you check in aboard your ship, and before you unpack your bags, go to the purser and ask for a free or discount upgrade to a balcony cabin.

We've tried this on several cruises, maybe four or five times, and were successful twice. One one occasion, maybe because we truthfully said it was our 40th wedding anniversary, we were bumped up to a fantastic balcony suite on an upper deck at no extra charge at all. You have nothing to lose if you ask to be bumped up, even if you fib about your anniversary and need to slip in \$20 or so in balcony bribery bucks.