

We've been on a dozen or so cruises since my retirement, and have some suggestions on how to make the best and most satisfying deals. You may not agree with these ideas, but we enjoyed our cruises much more when we did them right.



1. Travel light. After our second or third cruise, we stopped dragging suitcases and needing to check them everywhere we went. We each took a wheeled carry-on bag and a knapsack, and never again checked anything. Suitcases on flights and cruises must be checked, and the waiting and wondering everywhere you have to retrieve them just adds to the stress. On several occasions, fellow cruise passengers lost luggage and had to buy entirely new outfits from expensive onboard shops.
2. Unless a for-fee shore excursion during the cruise is an absolute must for you, don't sign up for any. They usually cost \$100 or more per person for a couple of hours circling in a bus to the usual tourist traps. You can enjoy a more varied and relaxed adventure by riding with other couples in a taxi for a lot less money. Or you could just walk around the tourist town or hop on and off local transportation. With few exceptions, we consider guided tours from cruise ships the same as being led around like little kids on a trip to the museum.
3. Watch that diet! Many cruises offer 24-7 food opportunities, always much too rich and overloaded for most older people. Your body won't be happy if you go suddenly from 1,500 calories a day at home to 5,000 while stuffing yourself day and night on a cruise. Often what some not-too-smart passengers call seasickness is just results of gross overeating.
4. When ashore in tourist towns, don't eat food sold from open stands. If you didn't get sick from overeating aboard ship, your chances of having a stomach rebellion from bad native food ashore are at least as high.
5. Booking is always a tricky proposition. Traditional and online travel agencies constantly run ads offering super bargains, discounts and attractive amenities. By shopping around, we've made some great deals. Additionally, we've found that contacting the cruise lines directly by phone or on line has also been an excellent source of getting the best bargains, as well as unadvertised incentives like upgrades to roomier staterooms on upper decks.

Of course, there are many ways to get the best deals and good onboard programs when booking a cruise. Also, if you're a senior and prefer the quiet company of older people, be sure you book one that is not full of young high school or college party animals or families with overactive little kids. Check out cruise offers carefully to make sure you get the absolute right one for you.