

We've been on a dozen or so cruises since our retirement, and have some suggestions on how to do it more comfortably and economically. You may not agree with our opinions, but we enjoy our cruises much more by following these rules:

1. Travel lite. After the second or third cruise, we stopped dragging suitcases and needing to check them everywhere we went. We each take a wheeled carry-on bag, sometimes adding a knapsack, and never again check anything. Suitcases on flights and cruises must be checked, and now airlines are charging extra for them. Also, the waiting and wondering everywhere if you'll ever see your suitcase again just adds to the stress. Also, on several occasions, we felt sad for fellow cruise passengers who'd lost luggage on flights and had to buy entirely new outfits on board.



2. Unless a for-fee excursion during the cruise is an absolute must for you, don't sign up for any. They usually cost \$100 or more for a couple of hours circling in a bus to the usual tourist traps. You can go a more varied and relaxed tour by riding with other couples in a local taxi for a lot less money. Or you can choose to have fun just walking or hopping on and off local transportation as you like, rather than being led around like sheep on a planned excursion.

3. Watch that diet! Cruises offer 24-7 food opportunities, much too much for most seniors. Your

body won't be happy if you go suddenly from 1,500 calories daily at home to 5,000 while scarfing day and night on a cruise. Often what some not-too-smart passengers call seasickness is just the result 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 travel agencies and those online run frequent ads offering super bargains, discounts and attractive amenities. We've found that contacting the cruise lines directly by phone or on line is also a good source to get the best bargains, as well as unadvertised incentives like cabin upgrades.

Of course, there are many other ways of saving when booking cruises. However, there's one big mistake to avoid. Before you book, check the theme and timing of your cruise. One of the most frequent complaints we hear is when young, unmarried people don't do their homework before signing up.

Then, once aboard they find they're stuck in crowds of doddering senior citizens and/or families with running, jumping and screaming little kids. Conversely, we have elderly friends who mistakenly booked a Caribbean cruise during Spring Break. It's tough to do the limbo at 3 am when you're 85.

Check out cruise offers carefully to make sure you get the absolute right one for you.