

No doubt at all: cruises are still the best all-inclusive, all-around vacation values. However, those bargain prices and never-ending free midnight buffets don't pay for the enormous expenses of running a big ocean liner. When you board your next ship, consider the fuel, maintenance, repairs, repainting, crew salaries, food supplies and all the other high costs.

You know the \$500 you pay for that three-night, all-inclusive sailing can't possibly do much to add to the profits of the cruise line. So, how do they make money from you? The extras, of course. Here are some extra expenses you'll need to consider on your next cruise. If you're very frugal, you don't have to spend money on any of them. However, in the spirit of fun and what-the-hell cruises give you, and knowing the extras are there to help the cruise line make a profit, you may consider none, some or all of them.



1. There's the booze. Wine or champagne at your free dinners, during entertainment events or at midnight buffets can show up as \$25 to \$50 each on your bill at the end of the cruise. Regular mixed drinks can add another \$5 to \$10 each. On some cruise lines, if you order soft drinks with meals, poolside and at shipboard bars, they can add another \$2 to \$5 more. In most cases, coffee, tea and juice are free. If you don't want to pay extra, just stick to the free stuff.

2. The most expensive extras are the excursions. They run from \$50 to \$200 for trips ashore than run from one to five hours. The usual routine is that you're crammed into a tour bus and then schlepped all over the port city to see the sights from the bus windows, stopping only at expensive little roadside souvenir stands, usually owned by the bus driver's family. If that's what you want, then sign up.

Otherwise, you can go ashore and stroll around the town for free. If there's a particularly attractive historical sight you want to see away from the town center, you can hire a taxi for \$10. If you want to shop, there are usually plenty of stores and sidewalk carts within walking distance.

3. There's the attractive on-board shopping. Many of the big new cruise ships today have big, elaborate store areas that look like downtown Beverly Hills. As you walk through, you're overcome with bargains on gold jewelry, hot-label clothing and boutique items. Because the signs say "duty-free", you're lulled into thinking the stuff is much cheaper than what you see in

your hometown store. It ain't.

As a special come-on, there's always a deep discount sale on the final day of your cruise, which bring the tags down from outrageously high to merely overpriced. As a last-minute buy, you absolutely need that \$35 t-shirt that says you sailed on the SS Excess of the Seas.

4. You just gotta bid on one of those original art treasures at the shipboard auction. You missed out on that Picasso-like painting that went for a mere \$500, and now there's one that looks like Andy Warhol did and you'll start the bidding at \$300 and hope no one else goes higher. What you don't know is that those look-alike paintings are mass-produced in rooms full of starving Chinese artists who get from \$5 to \$10 per painting. But, what the hell, when you hang it at home, who's to know that art masterpiece cost you only a couple hundred bucks?

5. There's the gambling. The bingo games are big business. With hundreds of players paying \$5 to \$10 a card, and although a few players win money, each game is a profit center. The biggest gambling takes come from the ship's casino. The passengers' what-the-hell spirit is there at the tables and slot machines, and the ship rakes in thousands of bucks from gambling profits during each cruise.

6. Tipping can tip your bill up a whole lot. This one irks some passengers, especially when the ship lists the specific amounts of expected tips for everyone from the dining room's maitre 'd, to waiters, to bus boys to cabin stewards. In some cruise lines, the money is automatically added to your bill, but others imply the tips are totally voluntary. Yeah, sure. Tipping can add another \$500 or more to your cruise bill.

Of course, there are many other expenses that could add costs to your all-inclusive cruise vacation, such as spa treatments, extra-fee upscale restaurants, portrait photographers and many more. However, despite the extras, which are mostly voluntary anyhow, cruises are still the very best vacation bargain, averaging \$100 to \$200 a day. If you don't believe that, try spending three days and nights in an upscale New York City, Paris, Tokyo or London hotel and eat at posh restaurants, and expect to pay the same.