



The savvy senior traveler who's planning to go on a cruise explores all of the options. It starts with daily surfing for internet travel agencies and cruise line websites. The secret is no secret if you do it right.

1. Book very early or very late: There are two widely-separated time frames when prices are hottest. First, by early booking of a cruise several months in advance, you can get your choice of cabins. Additionally, cruise lines want the income generated by having as many of their cabins booked as early as possible. As incentive, advertised prices are lower then.

Conversely, when you make a last-minute booking, you could also get a lower price. Ships must sail on schedule whether totally full or not. Fearing empty cabins, cruise lines will lower prices, sometimes drastically, in the last three or four days before sailing. This can be particularly appealing to retirees, who can pack and go on short notice.

2. Ask for upgrades: When booking with an online or hometown travel agency, select your cabin at the listed price. Then ask if you can get an upgrade to a larger cabin or more convenient deck location for a modest extra payment or at no extra cost.

If refused at the time of booking, don't give up. After you board, before you occupy your assigned cabin, go to the check-in desk. Sometimes, if the ship isn't fully booked, you can get a better cabin, also for a slightly extra fee or for free.

3. Gather a gang: One secret way to book a great cruise vacation is to do your own agent job. Choose a cruise with a great destination that will attract others to join you. Get all the information from a travel agency or cruise line. Then, from family, alumni, church or social club, recruit others to join you.

In addition to enjoying the cruise with familiar people, as the acting agent you may sail free. Many cruise lines offer one free cruise with every four to eight passengers in a group booking. You can pocket the savings or use it to lower the fares of other members of your group.

The secrets to booking a great cruise vacation at the best price are open to everyone. Just do your homework and search out great bargains. They're there when and where you know how to find them.