



There are many factors and choices. When you're signing up for a cruise, first check out some of the more important considerations:

1. Timing: Prices vary widely throughout the year. The most popular and costly are from mid-June to late-August, plus Christmas and Spring Break. If you can book a cruise for during less active times, such as mid-September to early-November, you'll save from 20 to 50 percent.

2. Be chart smart: Look at a diagram of the ship from the cruise company's online website. Study the chart for cabin locations and sizes. Understand various choices, as well as locations of dining, entertainment, shopping and other ship facilities. 3. Select your cabin: Seniors should note that the most accessible are near elevators, central stairways, dining, entertainment, pools and spas. They're at the front (bow) of the ship, where motion of the ocean is less evident. The cheaper inside cabins on lowest decks have no outside views, while some slightly more costly have portholes. The higher-priced ones have large windows, and the most expensive have clear glass sliding doors onto private balconies.

Additionally, as charts indicate, cheaper cabins often have porthole or window views obstructed by lifeboats and other deck equipment. The higher-priced staterooms allow more living space. The most pricey are two-unit suites on choicest upper deck locations.

4. Alone or sharing: Your choice also is affected by the number of people who'll share your cabin. In the very cheapest, there may be upper and lower bunks, accommodating four people in a very close space. If you're traveling alone, a small cabin may be adequate, but many cruise lines set cabin prices based on two occupants each.

This requires the lone passenger to pay the same price as two would. When you book, to save money, you can agree to share the cabin with another single passenger of your gender.

5. Balcony or not: The extra doors and private outside sitting and ocean-viewing spaces are very attractive, but balconies can add from \$50 a day to the price. To be frugal, don't book a balcony and spend your waking time on deck and enjoy the many outside activities. For views, go to the railings. Who needs views when spending eight hours or less daily asleep at night in

your cabin?

6. Higher up means sky-high costs: If you sign on to what is usually designated as the highest decks, the the most luxurious accommodations are there. They're called Royal Suite, Owner's Suite and Grand Suite.

They cost from twice to ten times more than the cabins below. They're very roomy, have extensive balconies with the best all-around outside views on the ship. Some are two-level, and as luxurious as a Park Avenue condo.

Cruise ships offer scores of choices in selecting cabins. You can pay hundreds for a little cabin on a lower deck or thousands for an elegant suite above. However, once out of their cabins, every passenger can enjoy all the features and activities with equal pleasure.