



Just retired or ready for a new vacation experience on the seven seas? Consider some tips on making a smooth transition from landlubber to experienced sailor:

1. Use a live travel agent. Online agency ads look attractive and seem to cover everything, but for that first cruise, you need to face-to-face with an expert who can save you time and money. Also, if schedules get screwed up and you're stranded, savvy agents have ways to solve the problems.
2. If you fear being seasick, consult with your family doctor for taking appropriate meds with you. Also, have enough to last at least the length of the cruise and several days beyond, in case of delays. Bring copies of doctor's prescriptions if you lose your supply or need refills.
3. If you believe the rocking of the ship could get to you, book a midships cabin. Fore and aft areas tend to sway more, and in rough seas it could disturb your sleep and/or stomach. On the larger liners, most of the time you don't even feel any motion of the sea.
4. Don't overpack. Especially if you have to fly to the port for your cruise, travel as light as you can. Pay no attention to the photos you see of 1930s cruises, where everyone dressed formal for dinner, entertainment and everything else. Of course, if you really want to spiff up for formal photos to send to the folks back home, most large ships have tux and gown rental shops for that special dinner at the captain's table.
5. Go aboard as early as you can. Your instructions may say boarding is at 5 p.m. However, if

you've flown in and already at the port at noon, check with ship's staff on the dock to see how early you can get to your cabin. Boarding early will avoid the heavy passenger traffic and crowded passageways later in the day.

6. When talking with your travel agent about the cruise, review shore excursion offers carefully. Most cost from \$100 up per person, and you can often do the same for only \$25 in a cab ride around the port city sights. Or just go ashore free to wander the port and other sights on your own.

7. When in tropical ports, drink only commercially bottled water supplied by the ship. Additionally, don't eat raw or cooked food from open-air street vendors. You don't want to chance ruining your cruise by food poisoning.

8. For three daily meals aboard, you usually have the choice of sitting and being served, or a buffet. The temptations for overeating will be there, but be kind to your landlubber stomach, and go moderate on size and number of servings.

9. Big cruise ships usually have two seating times for dinner, 6 pm and 8 pm. You may also have the choice of a table for two, four or larger. Get a larger table if you like conversation with a lot of people. You may have those choices early when your travel agent makes your reservations.

10. For your first cruise, you may be happily surprised that the all-exclusive cost per person is moderate compared to staying at an upscale resort, where you pay separately for restaurant meals and entertainment.

However, cruise ships have ways to get you to dig in and pay more. Booze, wine, beer and sodas may cost \$10 a glass and more per bottle. Spa treatments are expensive. The ship's printed photos of you posing with the captain can cost \$20 each. Use your own camera and/or smartphone to record your happenings. The onboard gift shops have high prices, too.

Your first-time cruise can be a very enjoyable experience. If you follow some very simple rules on moderation and economy, when you're back on land again, you'll want to sign up soon for more sea-going adventures.