

USEFUL TIPS FOR CRUISING BEGINNERS



As there are still many people totally new to cruising, this article should give a broad overview on what to take care of when going on a cruise for the first time.

Deciding for a cruise vacation

When deciding to go on a cruise vacation a world of options lies before you. There are many different cruise lines operating many different ships each under different concepts on different itineraries. So first you should try to find out which cruise line or which particular ship/itinerary fits your interests. Lots of information is available from travel agencies as well as from websites like CruiseMates or CruiseReviews. CruiseMates offers a range of staff-written cruise reviews whereas CruiseReviews provides personal experiences from other cruisers. Another source of information might be Cruise Critic.

When you finally decide on an itinerary and/or cruise ship you should try to get the best price. A high possibility to get a cheap price is to be a bit time flexible when deciding on a possible time frame for your journey. Prices will also vary depending on the cabin type you choose. You can then either book a cruise online or visit a travel agent to get some more information and have the booking done for you.

Things that should be done in advance of the departure

When your cruise documents arrive you also receive some information you might want to give to friends or family members telling how they can reach you on board during the cruise.

Have a look at the information package you got from the organization and read through it carefully. It contains essential information.

The most important thing is that you make sure you take all required documents with you. It is your responsibility to have everything available not the cruise line's. If you need special documents stating that you are allowed to embark in certain countries always carry them with you. Not every customs official might know all the rules related to such issues.

Make sure your passport is valid at minimum 6 month further from the start of the cruise. Otherwise you may be denied entrance to a foreign country. On the day of embarkation the cruise line often does not have the possibility to sort out such problems and often you won't get a refund.

Make sure you have enough time in the ports at start and end of the cruise to see all that you would like to. Often there is not much time left between arrival and transfer to the ship or airport. So if you wish to see a bit more of the particular destination plan one additional day for your journey and do not forget to book a hotel for the additional night.

Find out in advance which special clothes/items you need to bring for shore excursions. They are most often mentioned in the shore excursion descriptions. You might need to bring a rucksack for hiking tours or a swimsuit for a day at the beach.

For some countries you might need inoculation. You will find the information as well in the shore excursion descriptions.

Getting to the ship

Some companies offer luggage pick up service for a small fee. This might make travelling easier for you as your luggage will be picked up one day in advance and is brought to your cabin on the ship directly.

The easiest way to reach the ship is to book the transfer from airport to pier via the cruise line. They normally provide a company representative who waits for all passengers in the baggage claim area

of the airport. If you prefer to take a taxi, be careful when dealing with foreign currencies. Be prepared to give tip to anyone carrying your luggage in hotels etc. in some countries or cities it is common practice to pay a tip of \$1 per bag.

On board

Safety regulations say that there are no weapons, penknives etc. allowed on cruise ships and that some pharmaceuticals need to be registered as well.

On check in day you receive a key card which enables you to enter your cabin. This card is also used to pay anything while you are on board.

Some ships have a certain dress code. This is always mentioned in the cruise descriptions. Trends go towards more casual cruising. In this case, cotton shorts and a polo shirt are perfect for the day on deck. But you should also have in mind that air-conditioning makes the interior of the ship a bit chilly, so bring some warmer clothes, too. You may also take a few formal clothes for the evenings and dinner.

When you encounter problems with your cabin or have special wishes you can always ask your room steward for help. Always bring up problems as early as possible and do not let them ruin your holidays.

Getting sick during your cruise can ruin the whole vacation. So, if you do not feel well you can always see the ship's doctor. Pills against seasickness are also available at the doctor or at the reception.

Sun protection on board is essential because of the water reflection from the sea.

Take comfortable shoes for the day on deck, you might want to play shuffleboard which won't be good in high heels.

You should also take sports clothes with you for on board activities like playing basketball, tennis or volleyball.

Shore excursions can be booked in advance or you decide on what you want to discover when arriving in the port. If you prefer going on your own, look for local tourist offices.

Leaving the ship

At the end of your cruise you should get a final bill. Have a look at it and check it for incorrect charges. If you find something booked wrongly you can contact the reception to solve the issue.

Last but not least: You might be overwhelmed by the totally new and exciting world of cruising but don't get stressed. There will be enough time to discover all possibilities offered during the cruise. A day at sea is perfect to take some minutes to rest on deck reading a good book and enjoying the wind and sun.

Enjoy your cruise!

By Wiebke Wohlfahrt

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