



THE CRUISE COMPANY
The Experts in Cruise Vacations

FREE PLANNING GUIDE

Your Cruise Planning Guide

Your first cruise, choosing the right cabin,
getting the best fare, and a pre-cruise checklist.

1-800-988-6444

thecruiseco.com · Personal cruise advice since the 1960s

Plan a Cruise You Will Love

Cruising is one of the simplest ways to travel: your hotel moves with you, most meals are included, and every day brings a new place. This guide collects the questions our advisors answer most, so you can plan with confidence.

Inside you will find:

- Your first cruise: how long to sail, what is included, documents and embarkation day.
- Choosing your cabin: the four cabin types and the locations to choose or avoid.
- Getting the best fare: when to book and how our Price Drop Promise works.
- A pre-cruise checklist to tick off before you sail.

ADVISOR TIP

The right ship matters more than the lowest fare. A ship that fits your style, whether that means quiet, lively, family-friendly or foodie, is what makes a cruise great. Tell us how you like to travel and we will narrow it down for you.

PART 1

Your First Cruise

1. Choose the right length and itinerary

Not sure cruising is for you? A three- to five-night cruise to the Bahamas, Mexico or the Caribbean is an easy way to try it. If you already love the idea, a seven-night cruise gives you time to settle in and enjoy several ports. Popular first cruises sail from Miami, Port Canaveral, Galveston and Long Beach, and from San Francisco and Seattle on the West Coast.

2. Know what is included, and what is not

USUALLY INCLUDED	USUALLY EXTRA
Your cabin	Specialty restaurants
Main dining room and buffet	Alcohol, soda and specialty coffee
Pools, gym and most activities	Shore excursions
Evening shows and entertainment	Wi-Fi and spa treatments
Kids' clubs on most mainstream lines	Daily gratuities or service charges

Luxury lines often include much more, such as drinks, gratuities and Wi-Fi. Policies vary by cruise line and fare, so we always confirm exactly what your fare includes.

3. Get your documents in order

A valid passport is the simplest choice for any cruise. On closed-loop cruises, which start and end at the same U.S. port, U.S. citizens can often travel with an official birth certificate and a government-issued photo ID instead. A passport is still recommended: you would need one to fly home from a foreign port if plans change. Rules vary by sailing, so check with your advisor.

4. Plan embarkation day

- Arrive the day before if you are flying. The ship will not wait for a delayed flight.
- Complete online check-in in the cruise line's app or website before you go.
- Pack a small day bag with medicines, documents, swimwear and a change of clothes. Checked luggage may not reach your cabin until the evening.
- Attend the safety briefing. Many lines now let you watch it on your phone or TV and check in at your muster station.

5. Think about extras before you sail

Popular shore excursions and specialty restaurants can sell out, so book the ones you care about in advance. Consider travel protection, too. It can cover medical emergencies, missed connections and cancellations, which a cruise fare alone does not.

6. Budget for the onboard account

Ships are cashless. You link a card at check-in, and drinks, gratuities and extras go on your onboard account. Set a rough budget and check your account in the cruise line's app during the cruise so there are no surprises.

Choosing Your Cabin

Your cabin shapes your whole cruise: how much light you get, how much space you have and how much you pay.

CABIN TYPE	WHAT YOU GET	BEST FOR
Inside	No window. Usually the smallest and lowest-priced cabin.	Travelers who spend little time in the cabin, budget trips, sound sleepers
Oceanview	A window or porthole that does not open.	Natural light at a modest step up in price
Balcony	A private veranda with a sliding door, usually with two chairs and a small table.	Scenic cruises like Alaska and Norway, couples, longer voyages
Suite	More space, often a separate living area, a larger balcony and perks that vary by line.	Special occasions, families who need space, priority service

Location matters as much as type

- Prone to seasickness? Choose a low deck near the middle of the ship, where you feel the least motion.
- Light sleeper? Avoid cabins directly below the pool deck, buffet or theater, or above a nightclub. Check the deck plans for what sits above and below.
- Love the view behind the ship? Aft-facing balconies look over the wake and are often a little larger, but can feel more motion.
- Check for obstructions. Some oceanview and balcony cabins have views partly blocked by lifeboats. The cruise line's description will say so.

Families, groups and accessible cabins

Families can choose a cabin that sleeps three to five, two connecting cabins, or a family suite. Connecting cabins, family cabins and accessible cabins (with wider doors and roll-in showers) are limited on every ship and sell out early, so tell us your needs early.

Guarantee cabins: good value with a catch

With a guarantee fare you pick the category, such as balcony, and the cruise line assigns your exact cabin later. It can cost less, and sometimes you get an upgrade, but you do not choose the location. If location matters to you, book a specific cabin instead.

ADVISOR TIP

On scenic itineraries such as Alaska or Norway, a balcony is often worth the upgrade. In the Caribbean, where you spend most days ashore or by the pool, an inside or oceanview cabin can be the smarter choice.

PART 3

Getting the Best Fare

Cruise fares change often. A few habits make sure you pay a fair price and keep the cabin you want.

Book early for the best choice

The widest choice of cabins, especially balconies, suites and connecting family cabins, is usually available when a sailing first opens. Holidays, school breaks and Alaska summers fill early.

Last-minute can work, if you are flexible

Sailings in the next few months sometimes drop in price to fill remaining cabins. If you can travel on short notice and are happy with any cabin type, ask us about sailing soon.

Our Price Drop Promise

After you book with The Cruise Company, your advisor keeps watching your fare. If the cruise line lowers the price before final payment, we rebook you at the new, lower fare when the cruise line allows it. You do not have to keep checking.

- Price drops can be applied up until your final payment date. After final payment, fares are locked by the cruise line.
- Repricing follows each cruise line's rules. Some special or non-refundable fares may not be eligible.
- A lower fare can come with different promotions or perks. Your advisor will go over the details with you.

Special rates you may qualify for

Many cruise lines offer special fares for guests 55 and over, military members and veterans, residents of certain states or provinces, and past passengers. Airline employees and retirees may qualify for interline rates. Tell your advisor, and we will check what applies to you.

ADVISOR TIP

The lowest fare is not always the best value. One fare may include drinks, Wi-Fi or onboard credit while another does not. We compare what each fare includes, not just the price.

CHECKLIST

Before You Sail

Tick these off in the weeks before your cruise.

8 to 12 weeks before

- ☐ Check passports are valid well beyond your return date
- ☐ Make your final payment by the due date
- ☐ Consider travel protection
- ☐ Book flights, arriving the day before your cruise
- ☐ Reserve a hotel near the port for the night before

4 to 6 weeks before

- ☐ Book shore excursions and specialty dining you care about
- ☐ Complete online check-in and choose your arrival time
- ☐ Download the cruise line's app
- ☐ Plan transport from the airport or hotel to the port

The week before

- ☐ Print or download boarding passes and luggage tags
- ☐ Pack a day bag: documents, medicines, swimwear, sunscreen, a change of clothes
- ☐ Pack chargers (a non-surge-protected power strip if you need one)
- ☐ Share your itinerary and the ship's contact details with family

ADVISOR TIP

Questions at any stage? Call your advisor directly, or 1-800-988-6444. We are with you from the first question until you are home.

READY TO PLAN?

Talk to a Cruise Advisor

Tell us when you would like to travel and what you have in mind.
We compare ships, cabins and itineraries across cruise lines,
and after you book, we keep watching your fare.

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