
TRAVEL TIP 101 – Cruising in General

Unpack Once!

That is the mantra that many people exclaim when they talk about cruising. And for the vast majority of the time, that is true. The [very] minor exceptions are when river cruises encounter extreme high-water or low-water situations, but that is discussed in Travel Tip 103. And there has been only one time in the 55+ cruises that I have been on where that happened, and it wasn't actually because of water conditions. For the vast majority of cruises, everything goes smoothly.

The three main types of cruises are Ocean Cruises, River Cruises, and Expedition Cruises, with the latter being somewhat of a cross between Ocean and River cruising. But for in-depth discussion, the Expedition Cruises will be clumped in with River Cruises in Travel Tip 103. Regardless of the type of cruising you will encounter, there are some similarities you will most likely enjoy on your cruises.

An assigned cabin. This might sound like an obvious item to have on a cruise, but there are some cruises, such as the overnight ferry ride I once took from Copenhagen to Oslo, where many of the passengers did not have an assigned cabin – it was an extra charge. Those who chose to not pay for a cabin had access to the many bench seats and lounges on certain decks. When you have an assigned cabin, it is typically because you selected, and paid for, a certain category of cabin which vary depending on the cruise type and ship's layout, or deck plan. More information about cabin categories is provided in Travel Tips 102 (Ocean) and 103 (River & Expedition). Generally included with your cabin are your bed and bedding, an en-suite bathroom with toiletry products, although these amenities can vary greatly across and between cruise lines

Meals. Again, this might sound obvious, but I have learned to never take anything for granted. I have never NOT had the standard three meals a day provided on a regular cruise (I don't consider ferries as regular cruises), so I do have those as a standard expectation when I book a cruise. Depending on the type of cruise (Ocean or River/Expedition) that you are on, there might be a variation of offerings for breakfast, for example, or just one set time (such as on most River cruises). The venues for the meals might also vary, such as the main dining room is typically not open for lunch on days in port for Ocean cruises. And most Ocean cruises also

offer premium meals, typically at dinner, in specialty restaurants – for an additional charge, of course. I have found that most of these specialty dining experiences are wonderful, and they also make a great choice when you are celebrating a special occasion. Yes, you’ve already spent money for the cruise and its included meals, but an extra little splurge can make your cruise that much more special and memorable.

Entertainment. I have seen a great variety of entertainment across many cruise lines and even different ships within the same line, and I don’t mean “variety shows.” The biggest difference in this area is what types of entertainment are available on Ocean cruises and what might be available on a River cruise. These will be reviewed in Travel Tips 102 and 103, respectively.

Shore Excursions. For most cruise lines, the ShoreEx department is one of their significant profit centers. While some lines offer complimentary tours in some or most ports of call, there is generally a fair amount of marketing to “encourage” the passengers to book paid tours or excursions through the ship. I have seen many passengers balk at the idea of paying for a ship’s tour, opting instead to book a private tour, but I find that there are at least two significant advantages to booking the [usually higher priced] tour through the ship. The first advantage is that if the ship does not stop at the port (and that happens more than you might think), you will receive an automatic refund; there is nothing you have to do. The second – and most significant – advantage is that 99.99% of the time that the ship’s tour is late returning to the ship (a rare occurrence in itself), the ship will be waiting for you. There have been [very] few reported cases where the ship had to leave even when one of its tours was still out. That can happen because of tidal conditions or other maritime restrictions that force the ship to leave. But in that rare case, the ship takes care of you in terms of any necessary lodging, meals, and transportation to the next port.

Cruise Length. The big variation here is that most River cruises are in the 7- to 21-day length, primarily because rivers have distinct lengths. Yes, a River cruise from A to B can be combined with one from B to C, but the individual cruises are still the same [typically short] length. As with other details, this will be discussed in Travel Tip 103. Ocean cruises, on the other hand, primarily run from 7 days to

over 120 days, although there are some short ones and even some longer ones! These will be reviewed in Travel Tip 102. But the point is that the vastness of the oceans and the fact that the ocean liners are not restricted to a single shipping track, as are the cruises on rivers, there is an unlimited number of possibilities for the Ocean cruise lines.

Safety Briefings and Crew Drills. While these might not seem that important to cruisers, the safety of everyone on a ship, whether it is on an Ocean cruise or a River cruise, is crucial. Just like the safety briefing announcements on every airplane flight you take, the safety demonstrations and videos are for YOUR safety and your fellow passengers. There are laws regarding how frequently passengers must attend safety drills, and how frequently the ship's crews must be drilled to ensure they know what to do in the case of an emergency. Even if the crew drills might seem to be an inconvenience to you as you are trying to go ashore, you will be very happy that the crew knows exactly what to do if you are impacted by an emergency. So, just like that flight attendant's instructions before your next flight takes off, pay close attention at your next cruise safety briefing!

Happy Travels -- Thanks for reading!

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