

# 101 Cruise Tips from EECC Travels

## **Extras to Pack**

- Power strip for additional plugs (no surge protector) – there is only ONE plug in some cabins!
- SUNSCREEN and bring LOTS of it! Also, aloe gel in case of a sunburn – the Caribbean sun is intense!
- HAT! See above about the sun ☺
- Bug repellent for in port.
- Disinfecting wipes and hand sanitizer – 4,000+ people = lots of germs.
- Highlighter to mark the activities on board that you don't want to miss.
- Post-it notes or small dry erase board for messages (if you won't be using a chat feature in the cruise line's app).
- Ziploc bags to put your cell phone/camera in while in port and to pack wet things in for the drive home.
- Binoculars for looking off of the ship.
- Small first aid kit (with band-aids).
- Over-the-counter medications and also an prescriptions you need.
- Pop-up clothes hamper for dirty clothes.
- In case of wanting to do laundry: detergent pods, dryer sheets & quarters for machines (if your ship has self-serve laundry).
- Tide pen or shout wipes for spills on clothing.
- Downy Wrinkle Releaser is great instead of ironing.
- Light weight sweater or jacket – it can get chilly on deck at night.
- Clothes pins are great for hanging wet swim suits to dry on the line in the bathroom.
- Towel clips for beach towels – it can get very windy on deck.
- Many cruise lines allow one bottle of wine (750ml) per adult and soda (12 pack) per person in carry-on luggage (check the cruise line you are sailing with for their rules).
- Large cup with a lid for water and/or coffee, they cups are very small on the ship.
- Portable radio to listen to the local music while in port.
- Seasickness medicine (just in case) – Sea Bands, Dramamine or ginger work well.
- Magnet hooks – cabin walls are metal so extra hooks for storage are great.
- Over the door shoe hanger is great for the bathroom if you have lots of toiletries.
- Lanyard for your ship card.
- Decorate your door – it makes your room easier to locate.
- Extra memory cards and batteries for your camera/video camera.

## **Before your cruise**

- Download cruise line app
- Get familiar with the layout of the ship. Some cruise lines have this within their own app, but if not Shipmate app has all deck plans and there are ship tours on YouTube.
- Make a copy of everything and put in a folder. This includes copies of your passport or birth certificates, copies of health insurance, copies of credit cards and picture id

(in case wallet is lost or stolen) and copy of itinerary and anything you pre-booked before boarding (excursions, drink packages, etc) OR electronic copies on your phone.

- Complete online check-in, choose your boarding time, print and READ all of your cruise documents
- If you are unsure of a policy or a procedure, look on the cruise line's website – all answers are there!
- Pre-register your kids for the onboard kids camps (even the teens)
- Order any beverages (bottled water, alcohol) for your cabin or drink package – these are typically cheaper if pre-booked
- Prebook dining and shows (if applicable to your sailing). Some shows can fill up or specialty dining venues prime times can fill quickly.
- Prebook shore excursions, especially if there is something you really want to do as they can sell out.
- Once you pack, rethink the amount of clothes and shoes and remove some – don't over pack!!!
- Pack swimsuits, a change of clothes, sunscreen, sea-bands or patches for seasickness, & medications in carry-on – it may be a while before your checked bags are delivered to your room
- Attach a luggage tag to each checked bag and also put one inside in case it gets torn off.
- Make sure your suitcase is easily spotted – tie a bright ribbon to the handle, etc.
- Plan your travel so you arrive in plenty of time – the ship will leave you! If flying to port it's best to arrive the day before in case of delays
- Consider travel insurance. This can be bought through the cruise line or from an outside carrier.
- Look into parking before you leave for the cruise, there are alternatives to parking at the port which are cheaper, especially if booked online in advance. Also, some hotels have 'stay & park' deals.
- Check with your phone carrier for international plans.
- Get your home in order, make sure all bills are paid before you leave, put hold on your mail, etc.
- Make bank and credit card companies aware you are traveling out of country. Often you can do this online or in their app. Check to see if your credit card has foreign transaction fees. And get some cash before you leave home.
- Find the Facebook group for your cruise and join it! Or a Cruise Critic Roll Call. You will get to know your fellow cruisers before you even leave and it helps to get excited! There are usually fun activities planned as well.

### **When You Get on Board**

- Set your phone in airplane mode when you set sail and use the ships wifi for communicating – this will avoid international fees!! Check with your cell phone provider about international plans they have available in case you need to use your phone while in port. But when sailing ALWAYS be on airplane mode!!

- Use the cruise line's app! It is free to use and has all of the info from the daily schedules where you can set reminders of what you want to do. Also, most have a chat feature so you can text with everyone in your party, even group messages. Tip: The app must remain open for the chat to work. This app also has deck plans so you can navigate around the ship and allows you to book dining, spa treatments and excursions.
- Unpack as soon as possible (steward can bring extra hangers if needed).
- Ask the steward to empty the mini-bar (avoid accidental charges and fill up with your own drinks) – some ships do not have a mini-bar. Some have an empty mini-fridge and some have none at all.
- Ask the Guest Services desk for a postcard with the ship's picture on it – should be free; also ask if they can give you a free deck of cards (varies by ship).
- Corkscrew can usually be obtained by your cabin steward if you brought your own wine. Steward can also bring ice and glasses for your wine or other beverages.
- The library has free crossword puzzles and trivia games each day of the cruise (and board games).
- Visit the casino for a free lanyard for your ship card (varies by ship).
- Take a picture of the day's schedule each morning, this will date set the photos taken each day on your camera.
- Look through the list of activities each day and mark what interests you so you don't miss it - these are not printed and on the app. On some ships you will have to request a printed copy if you are not tech savvy.
- Teens need to attend the first night meet & greet!
- Use showers, saunas & steam rooms near spa free of charge (varies by ship - this is mainly for older ships).
- Inside cabins are dark. You can turn the tv to the forward camera channel for minimal light at night and it lets you know when the sun is up. Or you may want to pack a nightlight.
- Laundry or ironing rooms are available on some ships, but they are scarce. If ironing must be done, try to go in the middle of the afternoon as there will be a long line on formal night! Some do not have a DIY option but your cabin steward can have ironing done for an extra fee.
- Have your photo taken by the ship's photographers! You do not have to buy them, but you may want to if they are really great! How often is your entire family dressed up with a photographer right there?
- Look for the 'secret' decks at the front of the ship - these offer amazing views!

### **Food, Dinner & Drinks**

- Find the venues outside the buffet and main dining room that are included.
- Make reservations at the specialty restaurants prior to the cruise if possible, especially if there is a specific restaurant you want. (On some ships, the Steakhouse is a good idea for the first night and you get a free bottle of wine).
- Order room service for breakfast the night before an early port day.
- Ask for cheese and fresh fruit plate at the beginning of the meal, let your server know you want this every night and it will be on your table at dinner when you arrive

- Ask for kids desert menu in dining room, sometimes you might find something you like better than the fancier desserts!
- Check out Tea Time (mid-afternoon on sea days - varies by cruise line).
- Sea Day Brunch is fantastic and a nice break from buffet breakfast.
- Pack some snacks from the buffet when you leave the ship (no fruit in Cozumel)
- Eat lunch select specialty dining restaurants – it's free at lunch but there is a cost at dinner.
- You CAN order what you want of the menu!!! More than one appetizer, or entrée or dessert are fine!
- Custom pizzas are available at the pizza spot. You will have to wait a bit, but you get the whole pie! If you do order a special pie, a tip is a good idea!
- You can pre-order bottled water and other beverages and it will be delivered to your room.

### **Ports & Excursions**

- Check online before leaving to book excursions through a third party. Sometimes these can be less than through the cruise line or just offer more variety.
- If you book outside the cruise line then do your research and be sure to book with a reputable company!
- If you are new to cruising, and did not pre-book excursions, attend the informational talk on board.
- Take a small bag/backpack ashore with water, small first aid kit with medications, sunscreen, bug repellent, hand sanitizer, rain poncho and travel toilet paper... in addition to your camera, etc.
- Always take the daily newsletter with you when going ashore (or a picture of it). This will have the details for the ship's local port agent who is in constant contact with the ship – call in case of emergency or delay getting back on board.
- Take a regular watch off the ship and make sure it is set to the SHIP's time!
- If you are going snorkeling, grab some cereal from the buffet to feed the fish.
- Water shoes are a great idea! Some excursions require them and some beaches can be rocky.

### **Shopping**

- If you are new to cruising, attend the shopping show! It's a lot of fun and very informative. Be sure to sit up front as they throw free stuff into the audience!!
- Make bank and credit card companies aware you are traveling out of country.
- Don't use a debit card if possible! This can create holds on your checking account and there is less protection against fraud. Instead use a credit card with a free international exchange rate.
- Cash is best in port. Have smaller bills for 'negotiating' with vendors.
- The shops outside of the cruise port will have better deals than those when you first get off the ship. You will also have a better chance of negotiating prices with these vendors.

- Forgot to buy something in port? They will more than likely have the souvenir you are looking for in the shops.
- Check out the onboard shops for their shopping deals – some are not great, but sometimes there is a good deal like t-shirts 2 for \$20. If you are cruising at the end of a season (example: Alaska) there can be fantastic deals!
- Shops will normally have free samples of alcohol on certain nights... check your schedule.

### **Tipping/Gratuities**

- Gratuities per person, per day will be added to your account onboard the cruise unless they were prepaid. This goes to your room steward, MDR wait staff, buffet and other food venues staff and other behind the scenes personnel. These can be removed if you choose to tip in cash.
- You can tip above and beyond the gratuities charged for great service.
- Gratuity is added to every drink you buy at the bar or every drink package. No need to tip above unless your bartender is awesome.
- We like to bring a gift bag for our steward/attendant – (tide pods & dryer sheets are nice to add) – this is the one crew member you will have the most interaction with on board, make them feel special!
- Bring small bills (\$1s and \$5s) to tip. Or something that makes you memorable like \$1 coins or \$2 bills.
- BE FRIENDLY to the crew! They will go out of their way to help you, be kind in return!
- Room service may be free but it is customary to tip the person who brings it to you.

### **Activities not to miss!**

- Poolside Movie! Recent release movies are shown most nights on the Lido deck. Grab a blanket and some popcorn and enjoy the show!
- Views from the front and back of the ship – for the front view, you may have to find one of the secret decks – it is very windy but well worth it for the view!
- Theater shows – I have been super impressed by what I have seen! Some are Broadway shows that have been brought to the cruise line... truly incredible!
- A drink at bar – there is THAT bar on every ship... you will have to find which one is THAT bar on each cruise. These are the BEST bartenders and a fun atmosphere... and the strongest drinks!
- Tea Time – this is on sea day afternoons in the dining room, check your schedule for time and location – not only is tea provided, but small sandwiches and yummy desserts – and sometimes you will be entertained by a musical ensemble.
- A night at the piano bar – let loose, have fun and sing along! No piano bar, well every ship has live music!
- Comedy show – you will laugh so hard you will cry!!!
- Have your picture taken! All dressed up or just for fun.