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LOV-2-ESCAPE First Time Cruiser Guide

We Take the Confusion Out of Cruising

Choosing the right cruise at the right price is more challenging than ever before. In a climate of unprecedented growth and expansion in the cruise industry, it is the prospective cruise goer who is often left confused as to how to choose the right ship and how to find the best cruise bargains. Cruise ship companies are particularly good at designing attractive brochures and sizzling television commercials. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to tell the difference between one line and another.

How can you make sense of this sea of new ships, destinations, and the flood of information that is constantly reaching us from newspapers, radio, TV and glossy brochures? How can you differentiate between one ship and another or one line and another? And how can you find the best value for your money?

The purpose of the "Guide to First Time Cruising" is to give sensible answers to these questions - and to provide you with the knowledge to make intelligent choices when planning your first cruise vacation.

We have compiled our "Guide to First Time Cruising" based on our years of experience in cruise vacation planning. As America's premier cruise specialist, we have arranged cruises for millions of satisfied passengers over the years.

We hope this "Guide to First Time Cruising" will provide you with useful information about cruising and will encourage you to join the growing number of Americans who are finding cruising to be the best vacation value in the world.

Why cruising has become so popular

With the hectic pace of life today, it is no wonder that more and more Americans are discovering the hidden value and enchantment of cruising. From time immemorial, the sea has been a source of romance, adventure, excitement, and wonder.

Once the sole method of transportation between continents, cruising in the 1990s has developed into a highly developed science of fun and relaxation. Modern cruise ships are deluxe floating resorts which cater to every whim and fancy of cruise goers. In fact, surveys show that cruising has the highest passenger satisfaction rating of any type of vacation.

Between 1998 and 2002 at least 31 new ships will have been introduced. These include 136,000-ton, 3,000-passenger mega-liners to 10,000-ton, 360-passenger vessels. CLIA (Cruise Lines International Association), the cruise industry's trade group, estimates by the end of the decade seven million passengers will be cruising annually. Here are a few reasons why cruising has become so popular.

Cruising is all-inclusive

This means that almost everything is included at a fixed price that you know in advance. Here is what's typically included in the cost of your cruise at a price that is generally lower than a comparable land-based vacation:

1. Round-trip airfare.
2. Transfers from airport to ship and ship to airport.
3. Three main meals per day (breakfast, lunch and dinner). Special children's menus are available. if you are cruising with a grandchild.
4. Three buffet meals per day (breakfast, lunch and midnight). Some ships add a fourth buffet for late-nighters at around 1:30 a.m. Many ships also have afternoon snacks or traditional high teas.
5. 24-hour room service on many ships. Some new ships are adding 24-hour pizzerias.
6. All shipboard facilities, including casino, pool, Jacuzzi, sauna, gym, on-board lectures, card rooms, an unending variety of organized games and contests and more...



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7. Supervised children's activities offered on a daily basis. Good to know if you are bringing along a child.

8. All entertainment, including: Broadway and Las Vegas-style shows, lounges, nightclubs, movies, dancing and more...

9. Visits to more ports of call (depending on length of cruise).

There are a number of expenses that are not generally included in the cost of your cruise, which you also need to be aware of. These include gratuities (a suggested amount is \$10-\$12.50 per day per person, or \$70-\$88 per passenger per week for a 7-day cruise, paid at the end of the cruise); port charges and government fees (approximately \$135 per person for a typical 7-day Caribbean cruise, but varying in price depending on destination); shore excursions (discussed below); items of a personal nature such as alcoholic beverages, casino, boutiques, etc.

More on value

From a financial perspective, cruising makes good sense. But it isn't just the consideration of how to spend one's vacation dollar that is important. Cruising stretches the vacation dollar because of what you get for what you spend.

Take the dining experience, for example. Dining on a cruise ship is the equivalent of going to the best-rated restaurant in town. At every meal you will find fine china, crystal, and silver, impeccable service, and excellent cuisine. If the food is not gourmet, it will most certainly be presented and served as if it were. And there are no limits on quantity - you can have as many servings of whatever you like as often as you like. There is simply no comparison to the value one finds in the dining experience aboard a cruise ship, especially when compared to taking the family out to a typical family restaurant, or even to a restaurant at a land-based resort.

Intimacy, relaxation and fun

Although modern telecommunications never really isolates a ship at sea, there is the perception among cruise passengers that they are truly "away from it all," with no outside responsibilities to intrude on their vacation. This lends itself to an almost immediate tension-free environment.

Cruise passengers "wind down" more quickly, further encouraging an easygoing approach to new acquaintances and new situations. The abundance of fresh air, unending expanses of sea, and an infinite canopy of stars overhead each night surely helps to enhance the cruise experience.

While space on a cruise ship is ample, providing solitude and privacy to those who seek it, one tends to become more familiar more quickly with fellow passengers. The reality of "being in the same boat" means that one is likely to keep running into the same people again and again, or at least feel that they look familiar. No other form of vacation can make this claim.

The cheerful attitudes of cruise personnel are another factor in putting passengers at ease as they step on board a ship. Most cruise ships have developed guest services to a high art.

Friendliness is virtually institutional aboard most vessels, giving passengers the sense that they are truly valued as welcome guests. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the modern day Cruise Director - a bundle of happiness and energy whose sole mission is to bring people together for a good time.

Exotic Destinations

Destinations are another reason for the renaissance in cruise travel. Chances are that wherever you want to go in the world, there's a cruise to take you there. Whether for escape, adventure or a thirst for knowledge, visiting exotic destinations is a collective fantasy that appeals to everyone. As demand for cruising continues to rise, new destinations and itineraries are constantly being added.

The most commonly asked questions

Is cruising safe? Modern day cruise ships represent one of man's greatest achievements in the art and science of high technology. Cruise ships are designed to withstand the furies of the most angry seas, to transport passengers in maximum comfort, and to protect the lives and ensure the



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safety of its passengers and crew.

Cruise ships conform to international and national maritime codes for fire safety, seaworthiness, and lifeboats with life support systems (enough to safely transport all passengers in the event of an emergency). As to the whims and fancies of the sea, modern telecommunications and sophisticated, state-of-the-art weather forecasting have allowed ships to be warned well in advance of hazardous weather conditions, and to take evasive action if necessary.

One of the first things that you will be required to do when you board your ship is to participate in an emergency drill. You will be told where to find your life vest and then be directed to a specific location on the ship, which will be your designated area in the unlikely event of an emergency.

Will I Get Seasick? Modern ships have hydraulic stabilizers, which regulate the movement of the ship at sea to create more balance and less motion. However, the sea is one of the greatest forces in nature, and during rough seas, even the largest cruise ships can be subject to motion. There are many over-the-counter, non-prescription medications available to help avoid or eliminate seasickness. Dramamine, Marazine, and Bonine, to name a few, have all been time tested and are effective for most people.

Scopolamine, also known as "the patch," is a prescription medication that is applied behind the ear and time releases small amounts of medicine through the skin. Many people have found this to be effective against motion sickness. All medication should, of course, be carefully considered and your physician should be consulted if necessary.

One of the most recent developments in avoiding the discomfort of motion sickness is a product called the "Sea Band." The Sea Band is not a medication and, therefore, one may avoid the side effects that are common with some products, such as drowsiness, dryness of the mouth, etc. In the event of seasickness, most ships are equipped with modern medical facilities and a ship's physician.

Lest we emphasize the negative, let us say that for most passengers aboard cruise ships, especially the passengers on the new generation of superliners, Seasickness is very rare aboard cruise ships, especially on the new generation of superliners. One is barely aware of movement on the larger ships.

People are generally aware whether or not they are susceptible to motion sickness. If you do not experience motion sickness on a small powerboat or larger motor yacht, chances are that you won't on a large cruise ship. If you experience motion sickness on an hour and a half drive in the country, you may be more susceptible to seasickness. In this case, we suggest taking some precautions and/or consulting your physician.

Will I Be Bored? Think of the most exciting and well-planned resort and you have the modern cruise ship. Now add some of the most beautiful and exotic places on earth, the majesty of the sea and the impeccable and attentive service of the cruise ship staff. Is it possible to be bored? Millions of satisfied cruise passengers think not.

Outside, there are literally acres of deck space with plenty of open areas where one can sun bathe, swim or just relax.

Inside the ship, there is a plethora of things to do. Numerous lounges cater to a wide variety of tastes. Generally, you will find a main show lounge hosting Las Vegas-style reviews or Broadway shows. In addition, almost all ships have a disco for the young at heart, and a dance band lounge. Throughout the ship you will find smaller lounge areas where people can meet and greet each other. There are also card rooms, libraries (book and video), cinemas, and other nooks and crannies for small gatherings.

There is also a wide variety of activities organized by the Cruise Director and ship's personnel to keep you busy from sunup to sundown if you choose. You will find bingo, simulated horse races, aerobics, yoga, volleyball, a myriad of games and contests, and bridge tournaments - just to name a few. And, don't forget the casino, which is open when the ship is at sea.

Following the trend toward physical fitness, most cruise ships now have state-of-the-art health spas and gyms. Many ships have jogging tracks and some even have tennis and basketball courts.



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Finally, a cruise ship is not confining because of the destinations themselves. Remember that while you are enjoying all of the amenities of a floating resort, you are also in motion toward a completely new port of call. When you get off the ship, you will often be in a different country with different culture, different people and different scenery. In each port of call, you will find new discoveries and a host of new activities (golf, sightseeing, shopping, etc.).

Are there things for children to do? Many cruise ships have year-round children's programs with fully-trained youth counselors on board. Newer ships have playrooms, teen discos, video arcades and computer rooms. Some ships even have "kids only" shore excursions. Your cruise consultant will be able to tell you about the ships best suited to children and families.

Is cruising too expensive? As we've said before, cruising is all-inclusive. Compare cruising to a land-based vacation by adding up all of the different expense items and you will find cruising to be less expensive than a land-based vacation.

However, in your calculations, you must not forget the one major intangible: VALUE. The service that one receives aboard a cruise ship is usually far superior to what one would receive in a land resort. Dollar for dollar, even a cruise package that is more expensive than a land package may still be the greater value.

How much does a cruise cost? It depends on the cruise ship and length of cruise. Our highly trained cruise consultants will always know where to find the best cruise bargains.

Will I find romance on board? There is something about a cruise that is conducive to romance. Perhaps it is the fresh air, the majesty of the stars and the sea, the lack of responsibility and the easiness that is encouraged and occurs spontaneously among cruise passengers. Whatever the reason, cruising is becoming increasingly popular for honeymoons, weddings, anniversaries and singles of all ages.

We recently learned about two of our clients who made reservations through our company. The clients did not know each other before the cruise, but were randomly assigned the same dining table. There they met, fell in love, and were married just a little over one year later. For their honeymoon - you guessed it - they took a cruise!

What should I bring with me? Bring with you the same things you would bring to a land resort. Most cruise ships are casual by day with resort-wear suggested by night. Seven-day cruises usually have two formal nights where tuxedos or dark suits for men and cocktail dress or gowns for women are suggested. There are also two semi-formal nights where jacket and tie are suggested. Some ships are more formal than others, so be sure to ask your cruise consultant. Cruise ships tend to be cool inside so you may want to bring a sweater or wrap. Also bring comfortable walking shoes and rain gear. All cruise ships visiting countries outside the U.S. require proof of U.S. citizenship - either a valid passport or birth certificate. Some cruises may also require visas.

What is the best cabin location? That depends on your personal preference. Generally, there is less motion the further down and the more mid-ship you are. Some people like to be higher up and nearer to the public areas of the ship, even though most ships have elevators. Generally speaking, the higher you go, the larger and more expensive the cabins will be.



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How to choose the right cruise

Where do you want to go and for how long? There are different ways to determine where you would like to go. How long depends, of course, on your work or holiday schedule, your personal or family obligations and your budget. Cruises come in virtually every length, from 2-days to more than 100-days. The most popular cruises are 3, 4, 7, 10, 12 and 14-days in length.

There are many resources at your disposal to help you to decide where you would like to go. Talk to friends and associates about where they've been and which places they enjoyed the most or visit your local library. In the reference section you will find atlases and maps. The travel section will have guidebooks. The geography section will have descriptions of countries and cultures, while the history section will provide backgrounds of the places that you might like to visit. Travel magazines are also helpful.

By examining cruise brochures, you will get a feel where different ships go, what special features a ship may have and how the ships are laid out. Keep in mind that it is rarely necessary to pay the price listed in a cruise brochure.

Consulting a qualified cruise expert is one of the best ways to gather the information you need to choose the right cruise. Our staff has collectively sailed on hundreds of cruise ships. A knowledgeable cruise consultant can provide practical and invaluable information about cruise ships and cruise destinations.

Fitting a cruise to your budget: How much do you want to spend on your cruise vacation? This is certainly one of the first questions you must consider when planning a cruise. Remember that the best cruise bargain is no bargain if it does not suit your needs.

What distinguishes a "budget" cruise from a more expensive cruise? This is not an easy question because cruising is known for its emphasis on quality and service. Generally speaking, the difference could be the quality of service, the attitude of the crew and staff, the difference between good food and haute cuisine, the entertainment, the ship's amenities and decor, or something as intangible as the feeling created on board.

How will you decide how much spend on your cruise? If this is your one week during the year to travel, you might have set aside more funds because you want something extra special. Or, perhaps you will be celebrating some special occasion like a honeymoon or anniversary where you don't mind spending the extra dollars. If you are travelling with the family, perhaps is most important to find the least expensive cruise that meets all of your expectations. Or, perhaps, you are used to only the best and want a cruise experience to match. How do you like to travel? There is a cruise to fit every passenger.

Choosing a cruise ship can be like choosing a hotel. When you travel, are you more comfortable in a budget, moderate, or deluxe hotel? There are five basic categories in cruising: the budget/"Motel 6" cruise; the moderate/"Holiday Inn" cruise; the deluxe/"Hyatt" cruise; the ultra-deluxe/"Ritz-Carlton" cruise and the "boutique" or "niche" cruise. This last category includes all suite ships as well as "expedition" ships, ranging from moderate to deluxe. Please keep in mind that these classifications are subjective, at best, and are meant only to serve as a general guide to choosing a cruise. "Ritz Carlton" cruises appeal to the most discriminating cruise goers and are at the upper end of the spectrum in terms of expense, quality of service and amenities. Lines in this "ultra-deluxe" or "six-star" class include Crystal, Cunard, Radisson Seven Seas, Seabourn and Silversea. "Boutique" cruises overlap the above categories and include the cruise/sail ships of Windstar and Star Clipper, and destination-oriented lines like Orient Lines and Oceania Cruises.

Choosing a cruise best suited to your needs and desires: Like the old saying, "one man's floor is another man's ceiling," analyzing a cruise ship is, at best, a subjective experience. Someone who does not feel comfortable in a suit will have a miserable time on a formal ship that requires jacket and tie every evening -- even though that ship might be rated as "six-star."



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How to read a cruise brochure: You've heard the expression "a picture is worth a thousand words." Your first key to effectively using a cruise brochure is to look carefully at the photographs. Do you see any children? If not, you'd better check to see if there are children's programs on board. Are the people seniors or young couples? Some cruise lines intentionally target their cruises to a more mature clientele. Is the tone festive and high spirited, or more sedate and refined? Do the photographs emphasize destinations? How are the people dressed? If everyone you see is dressed in a tuxedo, that will tell you something about the ambiance of that particular ship. Does the brochure use words like "ultra-deluxe," "casual elegance" or "informal?" Deck plans are easier to read than they look and can tell you a lot about a ship. By reading the deck plan, you can decide where you would like to stay on the ship and what amenities the ship has to offer. Remember that you rarely have to pay the price listed in the cruise brochure!

Choosing a destination -The Caribbean

In choosing a cruise to the Caribbean, it is helpful to think of the Caribbean as three separate areas: the Eastern Caribbean, the Western Caribbean and the Southern or Lower Caribbean. The Eastern Caribbean consists of ports such as Nassau, St. Thomas, St. John, St. Maarten, San Juan and St. Croix. The Western Caribbean includes Jamaica (Ocho Rios or Montego Bay), Cancun, Grand Cayman, Playa del Carmen, Roatan and Cozumel. These ports are also referred to as the Mexican Caribbean because, with the exception of Jamaica, they are on or near the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico. Eastern and Western Caribbean cruises sail from Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, Tampa and New Orleans.

The Southern or Lower Caribbean refers to ships that are based in San Juan or other Caribbean ports such as Montego Bay, Barbados or Aruba. Since these cruises begin further south into the Caribbean, they are able to visit islands such as Antigua, Martinique, Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Kitts, St. Barts, Guadeloupe, Caracas, Curacao, Trinidad and Tobago.

Longer cruises (10, 11 or 14-day) combine Eastern, Western and Southern ports together.

A shore excursion is a sure thing

For many cruise goers, shore excursions are the highlight of the cruise vacation. Even in an age when the cruise ship is becoming its own destination, shore excursions add a rich dimension to the experience that can be fun, educational, or even both at the same time.

Whether you want to just relax on the beach or get an in-depth historical or cultural perspective of the island or port you are visiting, there is a shore excursion for you. And since the average tour lasts only 2 to 3 1/2 hours, you still have ample time to wander through the port city at your own pace or return to the ship for some rest and relaxation.

Shore excursions are varied in both content and price and can be classified into three categories: party fun (beach party or party cruise), sightseeing (island tour, city tour, cultural tour), or theme/attraction-oriented (scuba diving, touring a specific site such as the Mayan ruins of Tulum or the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg).

While cruise ship brochures do not list tour options, many cruise lines send a descriptive brochure along with documents so that by the time you board the ship, you have had the opportunity to plan your activities on shore. Some of the more popular shore excursions have limited space and sell out. To reserve the ones you want, plan on signing up at the Shore Excursion Desk when you first board the ship. Ships have interactive in-cabin television, which allows you to preview and order shore excursions.

To assist you in planning your shore activities, special lectures are offered during the week by the Cruise Director, the Shore Excursion Director, or guest lecturers. Topics might include the best places to shop or dine, the best sights to see, or a cultural or historical overview of the port. These lectures can sometimes be seen from one's cabin via closed circuit television.

The price of shore excursions varies widely depending on the port and the cruise line. An average price is \$35-\$60 per person for escorted activities such as city or island tours, snorkeling, beach parties, and glass bottom boat rides.

Special shore activities may have higher prices. These include golf (\$85 to \$150 per person), scuba trips (\$45-\$82 per person), seaplane or helicopter rides (\$165 per person), submarine rides (\$37-\$82 per person), horseback riding (\$60 per person), sailboat rides (\$40-\$80 per



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person), or extended land tours (ie: 7 = hour tour to the Tulum Mayan ruins from Play del Carmen - \$72 per person).

Longer shore excursions are more expensive. A half-day of Copenhagen has an average price tag of \$47 per person, while a full-day tour of St. Petersburg costs around \$135 per person. A 9 1/2 -hour tour of Rome averages around \$150 per person. Royal Caribbean offers Mediterranean shore excursions ranging from \$33 per person to \$154 per person.

In Alaska, you can enjoy a salmon bake for \$25-\$42 per person, take a 2- hour motorcoach tour for around \$40 per person or fly over Glacier Bay for 1 1/2 hours for \$145 per person.

One of the advantages of taking an escorted shore excursion is that it allows you to become better acquainted with your shipmates. You are likely to run into fellow passengers again on board the ship and feel a sense of familiarity. The warmth and friendliness fostered by the cruise and on-shore experience is just one of many reasons that people enjoy cruising so much.

For more information about shore excursions, [click here](#).

Going independent, traveling as a single.

If you're the type of traveler who likes to blaze your own trail, you'll be happy to know that escorted shore excursions are not a requirement on any cruise. When the ship lets you off in port, you are free to do as you please until it's time to shove off again.

In many ports, you can arrange your own private tour with an entrepreneurial taxi driver who can take you to the same sights as the tour busses for the same price or even less. What you get is a personalized tour with more freedom and flexibility.

Whether escorted or taken independently, shore excursions allow you to have a brief glimpse into another land and its culture. By tapping into our innate sense of discovery and wonder, we learn a little more about ourselves.