

Cruise ship vacation vs. land based resort vacation

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Instead of taking an ordinary family vacation this year, consider the rewards of a cruise vacation. As opposed to just staying at the resort you are visiting, you could be visiting a different country almost every day. Even with time restrictions while in ports of call, cruise ship vacations are fun and educational because you can visit four countries in seven days. From weekend getaways to world cruises, there is a cruise available that will fit within your vacation schedule.

Although the three and four day “getaway cruises” are very popular, the average cruise is seven days. You can book a romantic getaway cruise to the Bahamas or Mexico from ports such as Port Canaveral, Florida, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Miami, Florida, Mobile, Alabama, New Orleans, Louisiana, Galveston, Texas, San Diego, California, or Los Angeles, California. If you desire to visit the Virgin Islands of the Eastern Caribbean or a couple of the Central American countries in the Western Caribbean, seven to 10 day cruises are also available out of these same ports.

When shopping around for a cruise line, you will find that most cruise lines are very competitive with their rates, Carnival is usually the cheapest and Disney tends to be the most expensive. All cruise lines offer optional travel insurance at very low cost. I highly recommend purchasing this insurance. It covers a wide variety of situations ranging from canceling your vacation because of illness or family emergency, to becoming ill while onboard, to having to be airlifted off the ship because of medical emergency.

On one cruise, I became ill the day before the cruise and was very ill by the time everyone was ready for supper that evening. I had to spend the night in

the ships' hospital where I incurred a bill of \$995. The travel insurance I purchased paid the bill 100%. While I have been on a total of eight cruises between Carnival, Royal Caribbean, and Princess, it is difficult to say which cruiseline is my favorite because each has individual perks that are unique to that particular company. Another factor that will affect the price of your cruise is the type of stateroom you will stay in.

You have a choice of an interior room, an ocean view room, a balcony room, or a suite. The interior, ocean view, and balcony are all approximately 165 square feet each. The interior has no windows, the ocean view has one medium-sized window, and the balcony room has a private balcony (usually about 35 sq ft). My wife and I prefer the balcony room because it is so romantic to eat breakfast on the balcony every morning. The suites come in about four or five different sizes. Rooms also vary in price according to which deck you are on. The higher the deck your room is on, the higher the price will be.

Taking a traditional land-based vacation to a resort allows you to spend your entire vacation in one locale where you may wish to venture away from the resort and do some sightseeing. Most resorts also have a variety of rooms to choose from. Whether you want to have your vacation on land or at sea, the first thing you need to do is decide where you want to go, then choose your accommodations for your stay. As the countdown begins toward your cruise, there are several items that must be taken care of. Probably the most important document each passenger must possess is a passport.

This is required for all International Travel. A passport costs approximately \$90 and is valid for 10 years. If you do not already have a passport, it will take approximately six weeks to receive one by standard mail. If your vacation is at a resort located within the 48 contiguous states, a passport is not required; however, one will be needed if you travel to Alaska or Hawaii no matter what method of transportation you choose. You will also need your driver's license. Your driver's license will be used for identification purposes when you board the ship after visiting a foreign country.

Don't forget to put your cruise tickets somewhere where you will not forget to take them. You would not be the first person to arrive at the cruise terminal only to realize that you left your tickets at home. Pack clothing suitable for the climate of the country you will be visiting. Alaskan cruises tend to be a little chilly even in the summer months. If you are traveling to the Caribbean, light, airy clothing will be the order of the day. Don't forget to take a couple of formal outfits. Three to five day cruises have one formal night and seven day cruises have two formal nights. These are nights you dress up and act like royalty.

Starting with your second cruise on the same cruiseline, you will also find yourself invited to the Captain's Cocktail Party or Welcome Back Party! All medication that you will need on your trip should be packed in your luggage in its' original container from the pharmacy. Any medication that you will need on the day you set sail should be on your person as you will not receive all your luggage until approximately eight p. m. If you are flying to the city of departure, make sure to check with the cruiseline for transfers from the airport to the cruise pier and also back to the airport after the cruise.

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These are available for a nominal fee and are usually cheaper than the local taxi's. If you decide to drive to the cruise pier, you can expect to pay approximately \$15 per day for a parking fee. Early preparation is the key to a relaxing vacation. If your travel documents are in order, pack your suitcases about a week in advance and avoid the last minute rush of throwing everything together, and possibly forgetting something. On the day you are to set sail, I suggest arriving at the cruise terminal around 10 a. m.

This will allow you to beat most of the traffic, avoid standing in long lines, and you can be one of the first to board the ship, thus allowing you to be at the front of the line to eat lunch and sit at a table by a window.

Approximately one hour before the ship sets sail, all guests and crew must be at their assigned lifeboat station for a mandatory U. S. Coastguard lifeboat drill. This drill usually only takes about 20 minutes. Next is the sail away party on the top deck with livemusic, dancing, and waving goodbye to the people standing along the shoreline.

As soon as the ship is in International waters, the casino and onboard duty free shops will be open. Now it is time to prepare for dinner. You have a choice every night for dinner. You can eat in the main dining room (proper attire required) or you can eat on the top deck in a more casual atmosphere at the buffet. After dinner, why not take in a Broadway show in the ships main theater which is usually two to three decks high. A wide variety of bars and dance clubs will also be open to allow you to dance the night away. After a good night's sleep, a full day of possibilities awaits you.

Your first full day of vacation will either find you at your first port of call or spending a relaxing day at sea enroute to your first port. If you are in a port, please pay particular attention to what time the ship leaves and allow yourself plenty of time to return to the ship from your shore excursion. The ship is on a very strict schedule and cannot wait for people who do not make it back on time. If this is a day at sea, here is a list of some of the activities that are available onboard. Fitness center opens about six a. m. , trivia contests, scavenger hunts, men's belly flop competition, champagne art auction, bingo, slot machine contest, ping pong tournament, karaoke, after dinner Broadway style show, spa, library, Internet lounge, shuffleboard, mini golf, yoga classes, rock climbing wall, and there are about a dozen bars to choose from including poolside bars, sports bars, themed bars, and several dance clubs to choose from also. You can also choose to do nothing and just lay by the pool and soak up some sun. The most hectic part of your vacation is over once you have made it through the traffic and waited in line to be processed as a passenger.

Once you walk across the gangway and board the ship, you can leave all the stress and worries behind you. When you and your family sit down and try to decide where to go on vacation this year, think about how rewarding it will be to combine a world of fun with a learning experience the whole family will enjoy. Do you want to spend a week in a hotel with limited sightseeing available or would you prefer to spend a week visiting several countries with endless possibilities, and you only have to unpack your suitcase once.

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