



10 Things You Should Know Before You Buy A Cruise

How to Get the Best Cruise Deal (1-4).

Four simple tips can make a big difference in how much you pay for your cruise.

1. **Always shop around.** How much you pay for the exact same cabin on the exact same ship and sailing depends on where you book. While some of the cruise lines ban some types of discounting, *no cruise line bans all types of discounting*. For example, all lines allow agencies to reserve blocks of group space at early-bird prices, which they can sell at those rates long after prices have gone up. You can often save 10%-25% or more on your cruise if a particular agency is holding space on the cruise you want.
2. **Prices change dramatically based on when you cruise.** If you can cruise when most kids are in school, you can save as much as 75% vs. the exact same cruise over a holiday period.
3. **Book early or book late.** Book as early as possible if: a) you need to cruise on very specific dates; b) want a particular rare itinerary; c) need space for a big group; or d) need a certain cabin type that's in short supply. Prices are generally lower than average, and you'll get exactly what you want. Book at the last minute if a) you're very flexible in your plans; b) are able to travel on short notice (especially when you can drive to the port); and c) aren't as concerned with exactly what cruise you take as you are with getting a great deal. You will often find the best deals 3-8 weeks prior to sailing if the cruise line is worried about filling the ship.
4. **Never book directly with the cruise line.** You will never pay less or get more amenities by booking directly with the cruise line instead of booking with a travel agent. *Every cruise line* allows some flexibility to travel agencies to offer lower rates, provide additional onboard credits (i.e., money to spend onboard the ship) or additional amenities. In addition, travel agents usually have far more expertise than cruise-line order takers; can alert you to deals on other cruise lines; and can advocate for you with the line if anything should go wrong on your cruise.

How to Protect Yourself and Your Cruise Vacation (5-10)

Booking a cruise is a very safe transaction as long as you follow a few simple rules.

5. **Check out the agency before you book.** Every CruiseCompete quote includes a link: [Agency Background and Ratings](#). Here you can see how long the agency has been a CruiseCompete member; approximately how many transactions they've done through our site; read a brief history of the agency and the individual agent; and see Better Business Bureau ratings (if available online). You can also see how previous customers have rated the agency and read their comments on their booking experiences. You may also contact CruiseCompete directly (see contact info. at the bottom of this document) if you want more information on a specific agency.

Outside of CruiseCompete it's more difficult to get this type of information, but you can always Google the name of the agency to look for reviews on the web and check on U.S.-based agencies with the Better Business Bureau at www.BBB.org.

6. **Ask lots of questions and get answers in writing.** Cruises are a great vacation value, but they still cost a significant amount of money. Make sure you ask enough questions to be comfortable with what you're getting--especially if you're not an experienced cruiser. Feel free to ask for the answers to your questions to be confirmed in an e-mail.
7. **Always pay with a credit card.** Using a credit card gives you an additional layer of financial protection. Didn't get what you were promised? A quick call to your credit card company and the transaction is reversed.
8. **Make sure it's the cruise line--not the travel agency--that charges your credit card.** It's a rare event, but travel agencies do go out of business every now and then. As long as your money has gone directly to the cruise line, even if your agency goes under your cruise vacation is completely protected. Plus you will also get rewards--miles, points, or cash back from your credit card company--so why not take advantage of it?
9. **Insure your trip.** There are several different types of travel insurance available, and CruiseCompete member-travel agents can help you choose the options that are right for you. Unexpected things happen, from delayed flights, to weather conditions, illness so it is best to make sure you covered and eligible for a refund.
10. **Remember that CruiseCompete is here to help.** More than 50,000 people a year book their cruises via the CruiseCompete system with very, very few issues. However, if you should have any problems, questions, or issues regarding any transaction with an agency that quoted you via CruiseCompete, please let us know. Most of the problems we see are just communication issues, and we can usually reach the right people to get these cleared up right away.*

You'll get the fastest response via our "Contact us" page:

<http://www.cruisecompete.com/contact.php>

*Our attorneys do make us tell you that CruiseCompete is a 3rd party to any transaction and not legally responsible for the outcome. For more details, please see the Legal Disclaimer on our web site at:

<http://www.cruisecompete.com/legal.php>