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LIFESTYLE | TRAVEL

Cruise Ships Are Kicking Off Passengers With Pot

As state drug laws loosen, travelers run into restrictions on board, as well as drug-sniffing dogs and possible lifetime bans

By [Jacob Passy](#) [Follow](#)

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Cruise travelers wanting to smoke pot or chew gummies are running into a problem: cruise lines trying to eradicate all types of cannabis products on board.

Cruise lines say they are simply following federal law, and that marijuana is illegal in many countries they sail to. They say that they also want to create a comfortable experience for nonusers.

The companies are warning passengers not to sail with cannabis products and ratcheting up efforts to identify people flouting their rules as their ships swell with travelers. Among the efforts, Carnival Cruise Line has started employing drug-sniffing dogs and is sending out multiple pre-cruise messages that warn against bringing on marijuana.

Passengers say they are scared and confused amid the crackdown. Some passengers have been kicked off ships in foreign ports or banned, while others say they have used the products openly with no repercussions.

Josh DeLucio and his wife take about three cruises each year. He says he manages multiple medical conditions that cause chronic pain in his legs.

He never vacations without what he calls his mobile pharmacy, replete with prescription medications and other treatments. Among them: a topical salve containing CBD and THC that he says decreases his leg pain. He says he doesn't enjoy the smell of marijuana or being around people using it recreationally, but says it helps him manage his pain occasionally.



Carnival Cruise Line sends out emails to passengers warning them not to bring marijuana on board and has drug-sniffing dogs conduct surveillance before boarding. PHOTO: ZUMA PRESS

“My fear is being on the seas or in a foreign country and needing something,” says DeLucio, who lives in Richmond, Ind.

After hearing about cases where passengers were kicked off cruises for having similar items, DeLucio said he is reconsidering whether to bring the products with him on future trips.

Besides limiting potential legal liability, cruise lines could benefit financially by prohibiting cannabis onboard. Alcohol is a major revenue-generator for ships, and cruises also limit how much booze passengers bring on board.

Inconsistent consequences

Major cruise lines include cannabis on the list of items that passengers are prohibited from bringing onboard ships, along with other drugs and weapons. Some cruise lines also prohibit hemp-derived cannabidiol, or CBD, products that don't produce a high. Congress legalized them at the federal level in 2018.

A Texas woman received a lifetime ban from sailing with Carnival after CBD gummies were found in her carry-on luggage during a pre-cruise security screening for a trip this summer. Erin Van Veldhuizen was barred from boarding the ship, and her family received a partial refund after the incident, says Daren Stabinski, a Fort Lauderdale, Fla.-based lawyer representing her.

A 25-year-old TikTok influencer from Orlando, Fla., says he was asked to disembark in Jamaica from a seven-day Royal Caribbean cruise midway through the trip after he was caught on surveillance smoking marijuana on an upper deck of the ship. The man says he has a medical-marijuana card and had previously sailed with products containing THC without any issues.

His mother exited the ship with him so that he wasn't alone. Royal Caribbean didn't provide refunds or assistance in booking their travel home, he says.

"I learned my lesson. I had to pay a lot of money just to exit a boat that we already paid a lot of money to be on," he says.

Royal Caribbean said in an email that marijuana, even in its medicinal form or for medicinal purposes, is prohibited on its ships.

Regular rule-breakers

On cruise forums and social media, travelers trade tips about how to sneak the substances onto boats. Some put CBD gummies in containers meant for chewable multivitamins.

Nettie Freeman, a nanny from Monroeville, Pa., says the smell of marijuana smoke triggers migraines for her. On a recent five-night cruise with Carnival, she and her husband enjoyed spending time on their balcony only on the first day because people in a neighboring cabin were smoking.

"I think it's selfish of them to think they should be able to smoke and have it affect everybody around them," she says. The extra cost of a cabin with a balcony felt like a waste since she hardly used it.

"When a guest cannot enjoy their balcony because neighbors are smoking marijuana, this becomes a customer-service issue," Chris Chiames, chief communications officer for Carnival, said in an email.

He added that the legalization of marijuana and cannabis products at the state level in the U.S. has created confusion for passengers recently, particularly with so many people taking cruises for the first time.

“Guests who bring on and smoke marijuana on board usually know they should not do so, and end up smoking in nonsmoking areas like their stateroom, which is a legitimate fire hazard on a cruise ship,” Chiames said.

Legal questions

Similar to going through an airport, all checked and carry-on luggage is screened during the boarding process before a cruise. Bags are put through X-ray scanners to prevent contraband from being brought on board.

When passengers are caught with cannabis products, they are rarely charged with any crime in the U.S., defense lawyers say. Passengers can face more risks when caught with a prohibited substance abroad. Tourists have faced jail time or hefty fines for having marijuana in places including the Bahamas and Bermuda.

Defense lawyers say cruise lines may have motivations beyond legal concerns in banning cannabis.

“I’m convinced that the decision to take such a hard line on marijuana or CBD is because they are trying to drive alcohol sales,” says Spencer Aronfeld, a Florida-based personal-injury attorney who handles cases related to cruise ships.

Multiple cruise lines have increased the cost of drink packages in recent years. The companies also enforce limits on how much alcohol passengers can bring on ships.

Chiames, the Carnival spokesman, dismissed the idea that these rules help boost cruise lines’ alcohol sales as nonsense. “That sounds like something someone would say when they’re high,” he said.

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