

Information for New Cruisers

Passports, ID, etc

Most closed loop cruises (starting and ending at the same US port) do not require passports, but will require two alternate sources of ID. Some ports require a passport, so you must have one to board the ship; it isn't permissible to just stay onboard at that port, if you're at their dock you're in their jurisdiction. Some cruise lines require a passport to sail, it's their company policy. Some countries will not accept US citizens with past criminal records even with a passport. You must check the requirements for each sailing individually.

Weird Terms, Abbreviations, and all that mess...

- OBC - Onboard credit, money credited to your cabin for spending on the ship. *Tip: use it all, there's no cash value, once you leave the ship your balance disappears.
- Daily - It's like the ship's newspaper. This will be delivered to your room in the evenings and show the next day's events, activities, shows, times for meal/drink venues, sales, port info etc. Some cruise lines have gone paperless and your daily is in your free downloadable app.
- Tender - A small boat that takes you from the ship to land when there's no dock available; sometimes the dock space is full, sometimes there just isn't a dock large enough for a ship. These can be ferry type boats that are permanent fixtures at the port or at times you'll use the lifeboats on the side of the ship. Tendering can be a slow process and a bit tedious, but can also be a fun part of the adventure.
- Tender Port - No docks at this port, you'll use a tender boat 100% of the time.
- Pullman - Much like a murphy bed, flips down to accommodate more guests.
- Deck Plan - A map of the ship.
- Lido Deck - The pool deck, often the main buffet is found on the same deck. This deck is the location for your sailaway party and many other activities during your sailing.
- Muster Drill - Safety briefing required before sailing. (Post covid many are now a video.)
- Muster Station - Your assigned emergency meeting location, this information will be on your Ship Card and on the back of your stateroom door.
- Cruise Card or Ship Card - A card, looks much like a credit card, that acts as your room key and charge card on the ship. (Most ships are "cashless" except for the casino.) *Take this with you off the ship into ports, it's your "key" to get back onboard.
- Room Steward - This is the "maid" assigned to your cabin. They typically visit to tidy up late morning to lunch time and again while you're out at dinner for turn down service. You may leave notes to request assistance (such as "need more towels") or ask questions. These are your unsung heroes of the cruise, they will learn your name and how/when to assist you. It is customary to leave them a tip.

- Formal Night - The night will be announced in your Daily. Time to wear the evening gowns and tuxedos! Often this takes place in the aft dining room and there will be a photo location. Often the Captain is available to take pictures with you as well! You can decline to participate, the buffet is always open and there is often a secondary dining room designated for casual dress.

Scheduling

- Cruises are typically a week, Saturday to Saturday or Sunday to Sunday, on a set schedule by the ship. There are often longer cruises due to destinations/ports which will result in a shorter cruise to fill the remaining piece of the week, these aren't on a set schedule.
- As travel can be unpredictable, it's highly recommended to drive or fly to the port city the day before your cruise and stay overnight in a hotel close to the port so you're ready to hop on the ship in the morning.
- It's also typical to book your cruise a year ahead of time, though the sailings are published out for 2-3 years. The earlier you book, the more cabin choices you have.

Money Matters

- Total Price aka Cruise Fare - Is made up of: cabin price, port fees, taxes, trip insurance, gratuities.
- Drinks included - Are teas, lemonade, water from the fountain machine at the buffet, and regular coffee.
- Drink packages - Are add-ons to your cruise fare, there will also be an added bar gratuity. Each cruise line does their packages slightly differently, but basically there's an unlimited soda package (aimed at children) and an unlimited alcohol package (which includes soda and sometimes specialty coffees).
- *Big rule with drink packages, *everyone* in the cabin must purchase the same package.
- Meals/Snacks included - Your main dining room (open for at least breakfast and dinner, lunch on sea days), the buffet, and some ships have pub or deli type offerings.
 - You will have an assigned dinner time and table for dinner at the main dining room or you will be assigned "my time" dining for a different dining room and you arrive when you please.
 - For breakfast it's done like a restaurant at home, you just show up when you're ready during the posted open hours.
- Specialty Dining Packages - Are add-ons to your cruise fare, they are fine dining type restaurants, they require reservations ahead of time.
- Entertainment included - Will be the main theater shows, game shows, trivia, most activities listed in your Daily, karaoke, pool deck games and dancing, pools, slides, adults only pool and/or deck areas, demonstrations, and classes.
- Entertainment Packages - Are add-ons like arcades, virtual reality, roller coaster type rides, laser tag and of course casino games.
- Spa - Everything here including entry is an additional fee.

**If you're unsure if something is included onboard, ask the staff, they will help you!*

Deposits, Monthly Payments, Final Payments

- Deposit amounts will vary with each cruise line, it's typically a small amount sometimes as low as \$100 up to \$1000 for suites per cabin. The deposit holds your cabin and choices until final payment is due.

- Payment Plans are simple interest loans taken out with a third party, this allows smaller payments each month from the time of your deposit until the final payment date. This option helps many budget for their trip, however the final amount will be higher to cover the interest on the loan and it can show on a credit score.
- Final payment is the cruise fare, minus the deposit, due at 60-120 days prior to your sailing (varies by cruise line, but 90 days is typical). The final payment date (and amount) is given to you at the time of deposit.

Cabins

- Solo or Studio - Cabin for one guest; usually interior cabins.
- Interior - no window, on the upper decks these are in the center/core of the ship, or below the water line on the lower decks. They are always the lowest priced cabins, but there can be several tiers to pricing. Most accommodate 1-4 guests.
- Port Hole or Oceanview - small sealed window to the outside, exterior of the ship at or just above the water line. These tend to be the next to lowest priced cabins, there can be several tiers to pricing. Most accommodate 2-4 guests.
- Balcony or Veranda - sliding doors to the outside, with a small seating area in the open air. Placed on the exterior of the ship on the higher decks. Most accommodate 2-4 guests. These are the mid price range cabins.
- Suites - these vary a bit, usually on the top decks at the extreme bow and aft, most have a balcony, larger square footage and frequently can accommodate more guests. Most come with extra perks, like spa access, a special restaurant just for suite guests, special seating in the theater, butler service, etc. These are the high price range cabins typically at \$10k+ per sailing.
- Adjoining or Connecting - these have a door between the cabins on the shared wall, so you can freely move between the two without going out into the public hallway. There are a very limited number of these per ship.

**The cabins are pre-designated for how many guests they can hold, this is due to fire safety standards and isn't negotiable.*