



## **Make the Most of Your Cruise Vacation: Here are Top 10 Tips from Cruise Experts**

October 24, 2016

Officers in charge of hotel operations on cruise ships have seen it all: The first-time cruisers who come onboard big-eyed as they take in their impressive floating surroundings. Repeat cruisers arriving with plans to see and do everything. The overall joyful buzz as everyone begins a cruise vacation of a lifetime.

Whether you're a newbie or a frequent guest on the high seas, here are 10 tips from the pros on how to be a better cruiser.

**Experience a sunrise and sunset.** Getting up at dawn in a destination such as Alaska is not only impressively peaceful but brings your best opportunity to spot whales and other wildlife, says Adam Gorst, Princess Cruises hotel general manager on Emerald Princess.

Grab your binoculars and position yourself on your balcony or on an open deck and enjoy your first cup of coffee – with views. Later, do drinks while watching the sun setting over the sea.

In between, you may want to take a power nap so you'll be prepared for the ship's full roster of late-night happenings.

**Ask lots of questions.** The crew has your best interests at heart and no question is too big or too small, says Jasper Wolthuis, hotel general manager on Coral Princess.

"Passengers shouldn't be shy about asking any crew member if they have a question. We can help maximize your time onboard," Wolthuis says.

"If you really want to get the best experience possible, ask every single question that comes to your mind," adds Don Habits, hotel director on Holland America Line's newest ship, ms Koningsdam. "We are here to ensure that our guests have a wonderful time, and we encourage our guests to ask questions as we are happy to help."

**Read the daily newsletter.** The newsletter delivered to your cabin each evening has a full listing of activities and entertainment happenings for the next day. You'll find information on festivities, contests, lectures, dress codes, dining times, sales at the shipboard shops and more.

Unfortunately, not everyone reads the information and it's not uncommon for people to hear about a shipboard activity after the fact, say the experts. Don't let this be you.

"Use the newsletter like you would a TV guide – circle or highlight everything you want to do so you don't miss out on anything," advises Alyn Baker, hotel general manager on P&O Cruises' Azura.

**Advise the ship on special needs.** It's always advisable to alert the cruise line well in advance of your sailing. This applies to any mobility restrictions, health issues, allergies and dietary needs and requests.

All of these can be best accommodated with advanced planning, the onboard experts say. The crew onboard ships does their best to take care of all needs, but if possible it is always best to avoid a last-minute scramble.

**Plan to try new things.** On your cruise vacation you'll be exposed to new places, dining choices and activities. Plan to make the most of what's available, says Henk J. Mensink, hotel director on Holland America Line's ms Amsterdam.

"The idea is, how do you know what you like until you try it?" Mensink says. "There is always something for everyone in our daily programming. Your personal entertainment is subjective, but our ability to entertain you is not."

P&O Cruises' Baker adds that part of the fun of cruising is experimenting.

"You only get out of a cruise what you put in so why not try to learn something new such as juggling or ballroom dancing or attend one of the lectures by specialist guest speakers?" she suggests.

**Map out port days.** Whether you are booking shore excursions or planning to explore independently, you'd be wise to do advance research on your ship's ports of call.

"I am always a bit confused by those who reach a port and then ask at the gangway, 'What is there to do here?' It pays to be ahead of the game," advises Jessica Schumann, hotel director on Holland America Line's ms Noordam.

Plenty of information is available online, or check out the travel books in your local public library or bookstore. Once onboard you'll find port experts who can offer further advice. You may also want to pick the brains of your fellow passengers.

"Many of Seabourn's guests are very well traveled and therefore they may have excellent tips and suggestions of things to do and places to see," says Josef Schuppler, hotel director on the Seabourn Quest.

**Don't miss the ship.** You may have heard horror stories of people heading off on their own in ports and then missing the ship. Such incidents are extremely rare, says Diane Belshaw, hotel operations & retail manager on P&O Cruises' Oceana.

Still, it's important to listen to shipboard announcements and note what time to be back onboard (times are posted in daily newsletter and at the gangway). If you do miss the ship or run into other issues on shore, know that the cruise line has you covered with a port agent onsite to help.

**Consider pre-cruise overnights.** If you have the time, most embarkation cities are great places to visit. Especially when traveling a long distance, you might consider arriving a day or two before your

ship sails.

"There are a couple of important reasons as to why," says Cees Tesselaar, hotel director on Holland America Line's ms Prinsendam. "First, there is so much to see in these cities and you won't get to know them on the transfer bus between the airport and the ship. Second, you won't arrive onboard the ship exhausted from the flight. You will have had a couple of night's rest."

**Pre-book everything you can.** You may be able to book shore excursions and make reservations for spa treatments and specialty dining well before you set foot onboard your ship. You are wise to use this option when available, advises Freddy Esquivel, hotel director on the Carnival Sunshine.

That's because some popular tours sell out and booking in advance is also a timesaver.

"Rather than standing in line at the shore excursion desk, you can enjoy more time by the pool and doing other fun stuff," Esquivel advises.

**Take time to explore your ship.** It pays to become familiar with your ship's layout and amenities, advises Holland America Line's Schumann. That's what she did when she and her husband (who happens to be executive chef on the Noordam) vacationed on German brand AIDA.

"We spent our first day onboard exploring the ship from top to bottom to make sure we were not missing out on anything," she says. "The rest of our week was about enjoying all the ship and ports had to offer."