



The Cruise Chaos Survival Kit

Everything we wish we'd known before our first cruise

Don't just book it. Know it.

-  The printable cruise packing checklist
-  What to leave at home
-  The cruise money-saving cheat sheet
-  Embarkation day game plan



The Cruise Packing Checklist

Print it, tick it off, and walk up that gangway knowing nothing important is sitting at home.



Documents (keep in your carry-on)

- ☐ Passport or the ID your itinerary requires
- ☐ Cruise boarding pass / booking confirmation
- ☐ Printed luggage tags from your cruise line
- ☐ Travel insurance details and emergency contacts
- ☐ Credit card linked to your onboard account
- ☐ Flight and hotel confirmations



Embarkation-day carry-on

- ☐ Swimsuit and sunglasses (the pool opens before your bags arrive)
- ☐ Medications for the whole trip
- ☐ Phone, charger and a small power bank
- ☐ Sunscreen and a refillable water bottle
- ☐ A change of clothes for dinner
- ☐ Anything valuable or fragile



Clothing

- ☐ A dressy outfit for formal or "evening chic" nights
- ☐ Light layers for air-conditioned venues
- ☐ Comfortable walking shoes for port days
- ☐ Water shoes for rocky beaches
- ☐ A light rain jacket
- ☐ Sleepwear and a cover-up for the pool deck



Health & comfort

- ☐ Prescriptions in original labeled containers
- ☐ Seasickness remedy (ask your doctor what's right for you)
- ☐ Hand sanitizer and basic first-aid items
- ☐ Pain relievers and antacids
- ☐ Reef-friendly sunscreen and after-sun lotion
- ☐ Earplugs and an eye mask for light sleepers



Handy extras

- ☐ Magnetic hooks (most cabin walls are metal)
- ☐ Lanyard for your cruise card
- ☐ Foldable tote or day bag for port
- ☐ Zip-top bags for wet swimsuits and phones
- ☐ A small night light
- ☐ Binoculars for sea days and scenery



Leave at home

- ✗ Clothes irons and steamers (a common fire-safety ban)
- ✗ Surge protectors and power strips with surge protection
- ✗ Candles, incense and anything with an open flame
- ✗ Drones, unless your cruise line allows them
- ✗ Your own alcohol beyond your line's allowance
- ✗ Too many shoes (you'll wear three pairs, tops)

Rules differ between cruise lines. Always check your line's prohibited items list before you pack.



The Cruise Money-Saving Cheat Sheet

The same rules we use to check every deal we publish.

- 1 Do the per-night math.** Divide the total price by the number of nights. For mainstream lines, under \$100 a night is strong and under \$75 is excellent.
- 2 Compare totals, not headlines.** "Up to 40% off" is the best case on select cabins. Add taxes, fees, port expenses and daily gratuities before comparing.
- 3 Price the extras you'll actually use.** If you'd pay for drinks and Wi-Fi anyway, a fare that includes them can beat a cheaper one that doesn't.
- 4 Check the deposit rules.** A low deposit is a great way to lock in a price, but find out whether it's refundable before you pay.
- 5 Keep watching after you book.** If the fare drops before final payment, ask your cruise line or travel agent whether you can reprice. Sometimes the difference comes back as onboard credit.
- 6 Be flexible on dates.** Shoulder seasons and school-year sailings are often far cheaper than holiday weeks.
- 7 Look for "free guest" offers.** Promotions like free 3rd and 4th guests or heavy second-guest discounts can cut a family's cost dramatically. Taxes and fees usually still apply.
- 8 Know your special rates.** Resident, military, senior and past-guest rates can beat public sales, but you'll need proof of eligibility.
- 9 Budget for gratuities.** Most lines add a daily service charge per person. Include it in your total so it isn't a surprise.
- 10 Bring a refillable bottle.** Water stations are free, and bottled water adds up fast.

🔗 Every Friday, our newsletter rounds up the week's best **verified** cruise deals. See today's picks at cruisechaos.com/category/cruise-deals

Your Embarkation Day Game Plan

The first day sets the tone for the whole cruise. Here's how to start calm instead of chaotic.

- 1 Check in online before you leave home.** Upload documents, add your payment card and choose an arrival time.
- 2 Arrive during your assigned window.** Getting there hours early rarely gets you on sooner, and cutting it close is how people miss ships.
- 3 Keep essentials in your carry-on.** Checked bags can take until evening to reach your cabin.
- 4 Skip the buffet rush.** Everyone heads there first. Look for other open venues listed in your cruise line's app.
- 5 Book what sells out.** Specialty dining, shows and popular excursions fill up fast on day one.
- 6 Do the safety drill properly.** Find your muster station and complete your line's drill. It matters more than anything else you'll do that day.
- 7 Learn the ship's layout.** Take a slow lap around the ship before sailaway so you're not lost later.
- 8 Note your "all aboard" times.** For every port day, write them down and set a phone alarm. Ships do leave without passengers.
- 9 Watch your onboard account.** Check charges in the app every couple of days so there are no surprises at the end.
- 10 Enjoy sailaway.** Grab a spot on deck, watch the coastline slip away, and remember why you booked this trip.

 Thanks for joining the Cruise Chaos crew! Got a story or a question? Just reply to any of our emails. We read every one.