

***Cyn's Fabulous
Guide to Cruising:
Over 40 Tips to Navigating the Love Boat***



by Kathy Holmes

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Foreword

by
Kathy Holmes

Thank you so much for downloading my free e-book, *Cyn's Fabulous Guide to Cruising*, based on the main character in my novel, *Real Women Wear Red*, described as "Fabulous" by one literary agent.

When 40-something Kate "Cyn" Francis changes her name, her hair color, and her age in order to snag a younger man on a Caribbean cruise, the last thing she expects is to fall overboard for a Cary Grant look-alike. Sandy Brown, 20-something and eager to get over a broken heart, is also looking for love. Millie Evans, having recently sold her publishing empire, is on a succession of one-week cruises, looking to reconnect with a past love. But this is no ordinary love boat. Three women, three generations, all connected in an unexpected way. And it's more than sharing the same motto that "real women wear red."

Whether your color is red or purple or pink or blue, I hope that you'll enjoy *Cyn's Fabulous Guide to Cruising*, [Real Women Wear Red](#), and the attitude behind it. Then check out my other books listed at the end of this e-book or on my web site at <http://www.kathyholmes.net>.

Enjoy!

Kathy Holmes, Author

Introduction

My name is Cyn and I'm addicted to cruising. I've booked thirty cruises, spanning three decades and one thing I've learned is this: no matter how much cruising changes, some things remain the same. And it doesn't really matter which mass market cruise line you choose, when it comes right down to the basics, they're all the same.

While most of the mass market cruises lines are similar, each one has its own personality. Some focus on fun, some on activities, some on quiet, some for singles, some for couples, some for families, etc. The cruise ship that my creator chose to describe in *Real Women Wear Red* was a mish-mash of several. Her perfect ship would be a combination of several different ones.

Whenever I show specific examples in these tips, I use Princess Cruise Lines. After all, it was the original love boat. I hope you find these tips helpful for whichever cruise you book. And when you're packing for your cruise, don't forget to pack your Kindle with a copy of my adventures in [Real Women Wear Red](#), (also available in paperback).

In the meantime, get ready to sail with me while I share with you over 40 tips. Why over 40? I'm over 40 and the older I get, the more questions I have. Thank goodness, I also have the answers. In fact, at last count, there were over 40 questions about cruising I've answered in the form of tips. After that, a woman stops counting.

I've highlighted the top issues in an easy-to-use, handy format, with categories listed on the "Tip Board" to the left, starting on the next page. You can click on the links to get to a category, or just page through and read each tip. Now let's get started.

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Dreaming and Planning

Tip #1: Cruising is one of the best vacations.

Come on—tropical beaches, pampering, delicious food, exotic drinks, opportunities to meet people—especially men, if you know what I mean, ladies. There's something magical about all being on a ship together. This is the stuff dreams are made of.

Besides the practical factor: unpack once and let the ship take you to different ports/cities. You don't have to worry about who's going to pick up the tab after dinner, getting back to your cabin after you've imbibed a few, and you'll never be alone, unless you want to be. There's plenty to do or you can

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just hang out and relax. It's all up to you. All-inclusive is the way to go.

So once you start dreaming, it's time to start planning.

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Tip #2: Planning is crucial for a fabulous cruise!

Okay, you've finally done it—bit the bullet and now you've booked a cruise. Everybody you know is telling you different things about what to expect or not to expect. You're confused. Or perhaps you don't know where to turn: there's so much information out there, it's daunting. You don't know where to begin. You don't even know what questions to ask.

When I first started cruising, there wasn't much information out there and there was no Internet. I had to learn by doing and the first cruise was overwhelming. It took several cruises before I really started getting the hang of it. And a cruise is a big bite out of

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your vacation dollars and you want it to go as smoothly as possible and make as few mistakes as possible. Mistakes, which can detract from the best experience possible at the very least to mistakes that can cost you and put your safety in jeopardy at the very worst.

Your travel agent, your cruise line's web site, cruise books, and Internet sites can be a wealth of information. You may notice that the Planning section in this book is the biggest section. That's because there's much to plan on a cruise. I recommend spending the time and effort on the planning. It'll all be worth the effort in the end.

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Tip #3: Beware: "all-inclusive" does not mean that everything is included in a cruise.

Most of the basic things *are* included. Your cruise fare includes:

- A room, including bed, bathroom, shower, phone, and TV
- Food in the dining room and in the buffet, although wine and soft drinks are extra
- Entertainment, such as what they call "Las Vegas-style Casinos" and "Broadway-style shows"

(Don't take these terms literally: the quality of the entertainment varies from cruise line to cruise line and from ship to ship)

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- Onboard activities (salt water and/or fresh water pools, pool games, deck parties)
- Gym with exercise classes, although some classes are extra
- Library and card room, but who wants to spend their time there?
- Nightclub and/or lounges, but the drinks are extra

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Tip #4: Services you have to pay for are the following:

- Full service spa & massage therapy
- Beauty salon
- Boutiques & shopping
- Art auctions/galleries
- Shore excursions
- Fitness trainers
- Full Day babysitting service (better yet—leave the kids at home with grandma)
- Bar drinks
- Specialty restaurants

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Tip #5: In spite of what you may have seen on TV, everybody on cruise ships is not skinny nor do they look like Pamela Sue Anderson.

No, people in all sizes and shapes, age, and all walks of life enjoy cruising. Some people do like to diet beforehand to prevent any overall anticipated weight gain.

You do not need to go on a strict diet beforehand unless you want to. If you do go on a diet beforehand, note that your stomach will shrink and if you attempt to eat like crazy on the ship, you either won't be able to or your stomach will complain should you try to do it anyway. You could feel sick.

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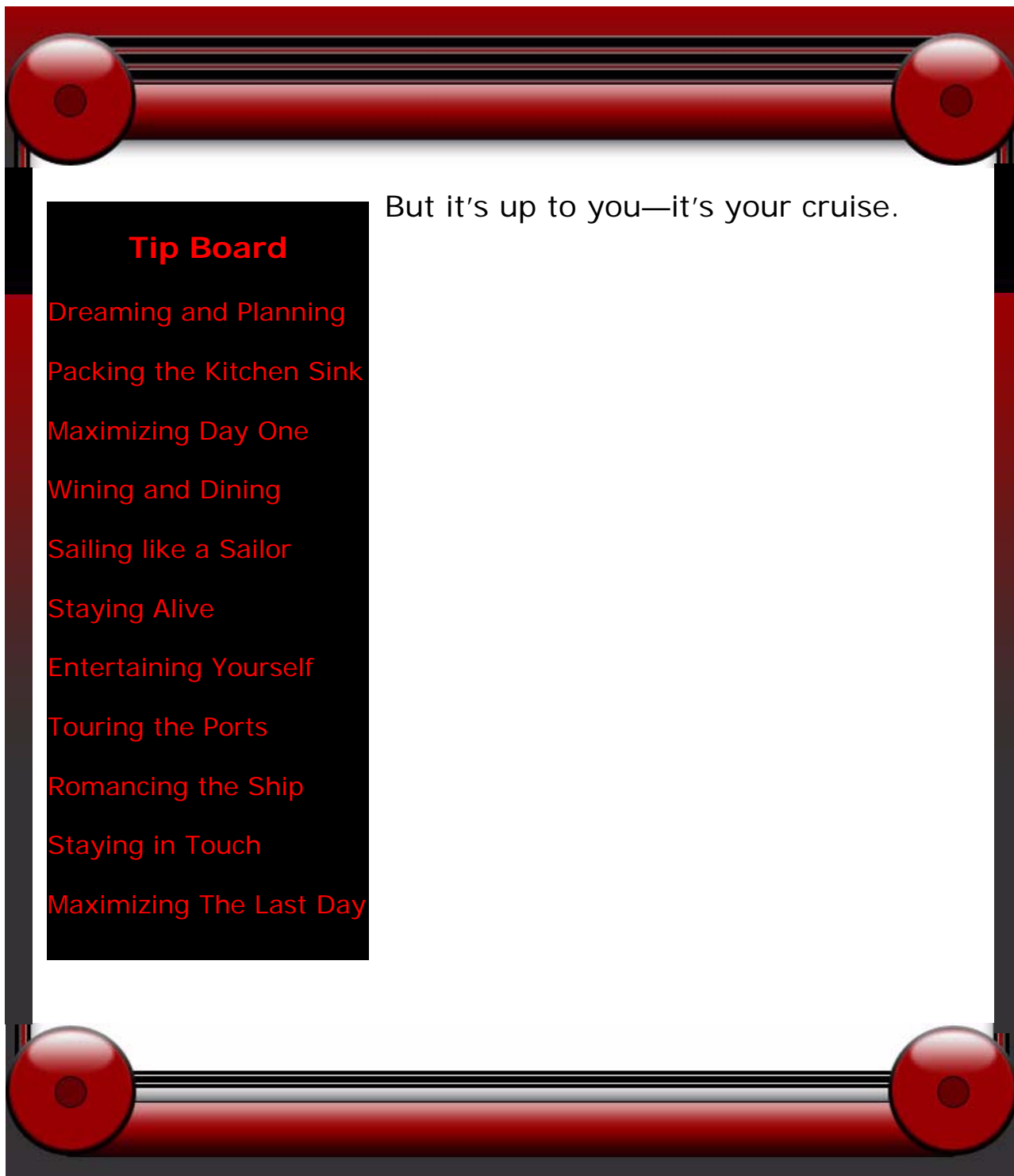
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A better choice is to eat in moderation on the ship. It depends on how you approach cruising. Some people cruise to indulge in the ever-present food at the buffet, on decks, in the dining room, midnight buffets. Others manage their meals by choosing certain times to indulge. Some will have a small breakfast of coffee and low-fat muffin, a salad for lunch and then indulge at dinner. Others will order off the lighter fare menu, and others will choose which courses they want to order. You don't have it eat it all but it's available should you desire.

Note: while tempting to do so, this may not be the best time to try a new type of dish—especially rich dishes you may end up getting sick on the cruise. I did that once and lived to regret it.



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But it's up to you—it's your cruise.

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You used to hear how only old geezers cruise. Not anymore. Cruising is for people of all ages. You want to choose your ship carefully, though, or the time of year or destination you cruise. Winter cruises or cruises longer than 7 days or Alaska and New England cruises during the shoulder season may attract an older clientele. But what's wrong with that? Look what happened to me on my cruise in [Real Women Wear Red](#).

On the other hand, if you're a single woman or a couple, you may not want to cruise during spring break, Christmas, or the summer. You'll get a lot more families. And some ships attract families more than others, such

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as Disney or Royal Caribbean. The most important thing you can do prior to booking your cruising is research the Internet. Every cruise line has a web site and some have a blog. There are news groups dedicated to cruising and even specific lines. See the reference list in the back of the book for pointers.

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***Tip #7: Get a fresh manicure/
pedicure.***

A fresh manicure and pedicure with a fun color goes a long way in getting you into the right mood for your cruise and lifts your spirits, making you feel more pampered, sexy, and wanted before you even step foot on the ship.

But should you get it done before you leave home or after you're onboard in the spa? If and when you get a manicure and/or pedicure, is up to you, whatever you're comfortable with. When I've flown in from warm-weather places, I prefer to do this at home so I don't have to take up my vacation time doing this. But coming from a snowbound location, getting a pedicure beforehand may not be as practical and

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you want to schedule that right away to start the cruise off right.

Of course, if you're traveling with girlfriends from different cities, you could save it for a fun shipboard activity together or if you're from the same town, you can go either way. If you're married and your husband wants to sign up for activities you're not interested in, you can save it for the cruise, too.

It's your cruise—do what you want to do.

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Tip #8: Book with a travel agent.

If this is your first cruise, you may prefer to book with a travel agent. They can guide you through the ins and outs, which can be confusing. Also, a good travel agent can oversee your dining room reservations and other special requirements you may have. But if you know what you want and are the do-it-yourself type, you can do it all yourself, including booking online.

I started out using a travel agent—back then, that was my only choice—but have since booked online. But there is something reassuring about working with a travel agent and they do have some clout in communicating with the cruise lines.

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Tip #9: While you do not need to buy insurance, I recommend it.

I've always purchased it, although usually from a third-party rather than that offered by the cruise line. Insurance is up to you and I'd recommend searching online to see what others have to say about it.

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Tip #10: Book your own air fare.

It often depends on whether you're flying in the day of the cruise or from a snowy climate. If so, you may want to play it safe and go with the cruise line's air in case of delays, the ship will wait for you or arrange to fly you in to the next port. If you fly on your own, you're on your own. But if you fly in the day before from a mild climate, I'd book my own air. You can better control the times of the flight, the seating, etc.

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Tip #11: Book your own hotel for pre-cruise stay.

When I first started cruising, I let the travel agent and cruise line decide everything for me. I used their air, hotel, and transportation. After I got stuck with flying times I didn't like, hotels I didn't like and waiting around for buses I didn't like, I decided to take more control over my cruise. I booked my stateroom, my air, my hotel, and took a taxi to the port.

What you do is up to you. There are pros and cons to either way.

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Tip #12: Choose your transportation to the port.

If you choose the cruise line's air fare package, it'll include transfers to the port. Even if I book the cruise line's hotel for the night before, I prefer not to book the ship transfers to get to the port because I don't want to stand around the hotel waiting for the ship's transportation. I'd rather wait at the port, gazing up at the cruise ship, taking in the atmosphere, and start my people-watching.

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Tip #13: Make remaining reservations.

The sooner you make reservations, the better. This includes shore excursions, specialty restaurants, and spa treatments.

Most cruise ships allow online booking before your cruise. But if you haven't done so already, do this as soon as you can—the first day is recommended.

Don't book shore excursions not affiliated with the cruise ship. It's always safer to go with the cruise lines shore excursions. For one thing, if you're late getting back to the ship, the cruise will wait for you.

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Tip #14: Cruising is not just for the very wealthy—you do not need an expensive wardrobe to fit in.

Unless you're targeting a luxury liner, you should be able to swing a cruise at some point in your life. Cruising on the mass market lines today is affordable for almost anyone. Some lines even have payment schedules where you can spread your payments out over time. You should be able to pull together an appropriate wardrobe without spending a lot of money. Some people rent formal attire before leaving home or onboard ship, and others pack several one-piece items they can mix and match, stretching the wardrobe over the week.

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Over the years I've learned that you don't need to pack so much—you really can mix and match. It depends on your goal. If you want to impress everybody at dinner every night, then you might go all out. Or if you're trying to attract a member of the opposite sex, you might go all out. Again, it's all up to you. It's your cruise.

Don't worry about packing everything but the kitchen sink. In spite of what you might read, you really don't need candles, irons, blenders, door decorations, CDs, videos, DVDs, extension cords, nightlights, etc. Okay, so include any of these if you feel they are crucial, but don't over pack. The ship really does have everything you need except for your clothing and prescriptions, etc.

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Should your luggage end up missing, you could even replace a lot of your wardrobe, makeup, etc. from the shops. You could get by with shorts and swimsuits during the day and a pair of dress slacks and a change of tops/ jackets for the evening. A pair of flip-flops or sandals, tennies, and dress shoes would also do. And most cabins include a blow dryer, shampoo, robe, etc.

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Tip #15: You don't have to wear really white shoes.

You must wear really white shoes—has anybody told you that? Now who told you such a silly thing? Other than dress code requirements in the restaurants, you can wear whatever you wish. While some passengers prefer to wear white sneakers or boating shoes, you can wear whatever color of shoe you desire.

It is important to have some sort of shoe with rubber sole for walking the deck—no, not the plank—the deck.

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Tip #16: Don't feel forced to wear white pants, white shoes, and a navy blue shirt. But jeans are hot in the Caribbean.

Nothing sparks more controversy, confusion, and questioning when it comes to cruising than the question, "What do I wear?" Here are some suggestions:

You should dress for a cruise the same way you would for any stylish land-based resort. Casual sportswear, including shorts, lightweight pants and jogging suits, is the order of the day both at sea and ashore in hotter climates.

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Tip #17: Pack a sweater, a jacket or an all-weather coat for cool evenings, and for shore excursions, depending on your destination.

Princess Cruise Lines advises the following on their web site:

Due to unpredictable weather, don't forget a hat or visor and a collapsible umbrella. Please be sure to bring proper clothing for visits to religious sites. You'll also want low-heeled, rubber soled shoes for strolling on deck, as well as comfortable walking shoes or sandals to wear.

Passengers dress as they would for a fine restaurant at home.

- Skirts/dresses, slacks, and sweaters for ladies

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- Pants and open-neck shirts for men

I don't usually fall into the "pack a sweater" category—I've always been warm-blooded—even before I turned 40. But I have been known to dress for warm Miami only to discover Miami was having a cold-spell and froze when I got there, dressed in my tropical attire. Also, airplanes are known to be too cold as are some areas of cruise ships. So, in this case, I'd definitely pack or carry on some type of sweater or light wrap.

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Tip #18: Get creative when it comes to formal wear.

While some passengers enjoy packing or renting a tux and/or evening gown, others will wear a suit and/or cocktail dress. And while I haven't seen any men in evening gowns, some women do prefer to wear a tux.

If I'm feeling especially slim and sexy in a great dress, I'll wear that. Otherwise, I usually find a dressy, sexy top to wear with tuxedo pants and a jacket and/or vest. I feel much sexier held together by form-fitting pants, but that's my body type.

Some women with great legs like to show off their legs and feel sexier in a dress. It's up to you. Wear what makes you feel great! It's your cruise.

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Tip #19: Prepare your carry-on whether you fly in the day of or the day before your cruise.

You will want to pack your toiletries for overnight, any prescription medicine, your embarkation outfit, swimsuit if you plan to swim, a light sweater, and, just in case, something to wear to dinner the first night just in case your luggage doesn't arrive on time.

The latter has never happened to me but I've heard of enough cases to be cautious. You can always pick something up to wear in one of the shops onboard, but if you're a special size or have any special requirements, you may not be able to find something appropriate. Make your own back-up plan.

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Maximizing Day One***Tip #20: Get to the pier by noon.***

Cruise lines are checking passengers in earlier than they used to. So if you'd like to get onboard ship as soon as possible, plan to arrive between 11 am and 12 noon. If you arrive earlier, you may not be allowed to enter the waiting room as the previous week's passengers will be disembarking.

Also, if you do arrive early and are boarded early, please note that your cabin may not be ready when you board. You may be allowed to drop off your carry-on bag in your cabin, but then will be expected to entertain yourself elsewhere. This is a good time to tour the ship, take a spa tour, sit out

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by the pool and relax or enjoy the welcome aboard buffet or I recommend meeting fellow passengers over lunch in the main dining room.

Go ahead and order that drink. It's a festive way to get your cruise off to a fabulous start.

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Tip #21: Call a taxi instead of waiting for the cruise line to take you to the pier.

If you want to sit back and relax and let the cruise line handle everything, go ahead and use the cruise transportation. This will also allow you to get to meet some of your fellow passengers before cruise.

But if you're anxious to get over to the ship and you're with a special someone or a group of friends and don't want to wait around, I recommend taking a taxi to the port.

I prefer not to sit around and wait and I really love getting to the port, getting my first view of the ship, and doing some people-watching of my fellow

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passengers. And look who I met at the check-in desk during my adventures of [Real Women Wear Red](#).

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Tip #22: Check your cabin and dining room assignment as soon as you can.

Often a member of the crew will escort you to your cabin. If your cabin is not ready, I would still go to the cabin and drop off your carry-on. Also, I would check to see what your dining room table assignment is. There should be a card with your table number sitting in your room—either on the bed or dresser, table, or desk.

Then I would go straight to the dining room to check your table to see if it's what you requested. Don't be intimidated by looks thrown your way or if anybody tells you the dining room isn't open yet. Accomplish what you set out to.

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It's crucial to check out the dining room as quickly as possible. This can affect your entire cruise. If there is something you requested and did not get: table size, location, or seating time, get in line at the Maitre'd's desk and request a change. Often, the change cannot take place until the following evening. Either way, a tip is expected. And if it is totally not within your liking and you can't change it until the following night, you could eat at another venue or order in room service.

Don't be afraid to change tables as often as you need to in order to have the best cruise possible. After all, it's your cruise.

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Tip #23: Don't expect your luggage to arrive right away.

Don't expect your luggage right away but normally you should receive it by dinner time. If not, check in with the front desk and they should keep you informed.

If your luggage does not arrive in time for dinner, the cruise line can assist you in finding some appropriate clothing. But if you're smart, you'll plan for that contingency and have something to change into.

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Tip #24: Get to know the ship and fellow passengers right away.

One of my favorite things to do when I first get onboard a ship is to take a tour. I love exploring ships I've never been on before. I notice a slight disappointment when I've cruised a ship before because there's not the same sense of anticipation.

Another thing I like to do is to join other passengers in the "Welcome Aboard" lunch in the dining room, if it's available. It's a great kick-off to the cruise, chatting with others, ordering a drink to start the relaxation process. I like to do this even if I choose to be more private later in the cruise, like if I'm traveling with a special someone or just cruising by myself just to get away from things.

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Tip #25: Don't look for the best entertainment the first night.

Your newsletter will have all of the entertainment options. The show in the big show room on the first night usually has an introduction to the crew show on the first night.

And that's often all it is. Don't expect the big production show the very first night.

On one particular cruise, my party of four was expecting one of the big production shows the first night and were disappointed when we discovered it was mostly about introducing the crew disguised as a show. The next time this same group cruised together we were discussing what to do the first

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night and when somebody mentioned the showroom, one elderly gentleman said, "We're not going to fall for that again, are we?" No, we didn't fall for it but we did go because there wasn't anything else we'd rather do. But at least we knew what to expect.

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Tip #26: If you haven't done so already, make your reservations.

Most cruise ships allow online booking before your cruise. It's in your best interests to book as many activities ahead of time. This includes extra-charge restaurants, spa treatments, and shore excursions.

If you haven't done so already, your next stop is the Shore Excursion Desk to make any excursions reservations. Don't forget to visit the Spa and make any appointments. The spa usually conducts a tour the minute you board and pressures you to sign up for any appointments—massages, classes, salon services, etc.—they go quickly.

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Tip #27: Tip often, even if tips are included.

Tipping makes the world go 'round. Whether you're in New York, Las Vegas, or a cruise ship, tipping will get things done for you—even if the ship has instituted a new "tipping included" policy where the tips are automatically charged to your account.

Tipping above and beyond will get you things you only dreamed of. I've seen ordinary people be treated like kings just because they tipped above normal. Bartenders who will fill their drink as soon as they see them coming or go out of their way to drag a barstool across the room in a Standing Room Only Bar, just for their good tipper.

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You don't have to be outrageous, just give it a little more than expected, and you'll be repaid many times over. Start on day one and they'll all know your name and want to please you the rest of the cruise.

In fact, some passengers recommend meeting with your cabin steward and tipping him extra right upfront when you make any special requests like fresh fruit baskets or ice replenished at certain times of the day. The biggest challenge is actually meeting your cabin steward. They often sneak in and sneak out in order not to disturb you. If you have trouble tracking him down, you can leave him a note.

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Tip #28: Don't be stuck in the dining room every night if you'd rather have some variety.

Most cruise lines still have a traditional dining room, divided into first and second seating. Each night is assigned a different type of dress code: casual, smart-casual, informal, and formal.

But there are alternative dining options on most ships, certainly mass market ships. There are evening buffets, alternative restaurants, on-deck parties, room-service (sometimes you can even order off the dining room menu and have it served to your room). Princess even has what they call the "Ultimate Balcony Dining" option where

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you can—for an extra charge—dine on your balcony, served by tuxedoed waiters.

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Tip #29: Don't be afraid to change tables if you're not comfortable with your table mates.

Most mainstream cruises lines have two seating with tables of 4, 6, 8, and 10. Tables for two are few and far between. Some cruise lines, such as Princess, offer you a choice of traditional dining at one of two seatings or what they call "Personal Choice" where you eat, when you eat, and with whom you eat.

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Tip #30: If you don't want fancy food every night, you don't have to eat in the dining room.

Cruise lines today have instituted casual dining eateries for every meal, including dinner. Many are included with the cruise fare, but some are extra-charge.

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There are eating opportunities throughout the day on most ships with 24-hour dining available on most. But you're not forced to eat every time food is served. Whether you pig out and gain weight on your cruise is up to you.

I love to dine and on a cruise is no exception. I try my hardest to work out, walk around the promenade deck for several miles per week in order to keep the pounds from creeping up. But I confess, I usually gain at least 5 pounds per cruise, which I try to take off right afterwards. The only cruise where I lost weight was when I tried the duck and it didn't agree with me. I was sick for most of the cruise and didn't eat much.

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Tip #32: You don't have to sail on a traditional ship with formal nights. Choose the right ship for your style.

Even if your travel agent has apprised you of how many formal nights, informal nights, and casual nights will be on your cruise, it often changes once you board the ship. The best way to be informed is by reading your daily program delivered to your cabin when you first arrive and each evening thereafter. The dress code for that day will be announced.

Depending on the cruise line—whether traditional or “freestyle,” it may vary. Traditional one-week cruises often have 3 casual nights, 2 formal nights, and 2 informal nights.

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But some cruise lines have relaxed dining options throughout the ship and that includes dress code. Some cruise lines don't have any required formal nights, some have one formal night and some have two formal nights on a 7-night cruise. You can skip these, if you'd like although some places may be off-limits to you.

More now than ever, it really is up to you what kind of cruise you'd prefer. You can go traditional and more formal or non-traditional, freestyle, and informal.

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Tip #33: If you don't want to follow the dining room dress code, don't eat in the dining room.

Maybe not, but it's best to follow the recommended dress code just in case. Plus, you show respect for your other passengers who have made an effort. Cruising is a very social event.

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Tip #34: You can make special dining requests or order items not on the dining room menu.

It varies from night to night, but most lines have always-available items such as chicken, steak, or baked potato. Some lines even allow dining off the dining room menu and have it delivered to your room, depending on the cabin you've booked.

In the dining room, items such as cutoff T-shirts, shorts, halter tops, and jeans are not permitted; shoes must be worn at all times.

For formal night:

- Evening gowns and cocktail dresses for ladies

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- Tuxedo, slacks with dinner jackets, or suits for men

All mass market cruise lines offer formal wear rental on all cruises; this can be arranged prior to embarkation.

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Tip #35: Don't think you can ignore dining room and other shipboard etiquette just because you're on vacation.

Princess posts the following guidelines on their web site about etiquette in the dining room, including etiquette in general:

Smoking is not allowed in the dining rooms, or any other food service area, or in the show lounges and theaters. Smoking is permitted in staterooms, stateroom balconies, and designated areas. As a courtesy to your fellow passengers, please refrain from smoking pipes and cigars in all public rooms.

Should you wish to videotape onboard during your cruise, please feel free to

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do so. However, videotaping the onboard entertainment performances is not allowed for copyright reasons.

We require passengers to use cover-ups over bathing suits when entering the ship's public rooms.

Jeans and shorts are not permitted in the dining rooms during dinner.

I would add to please consider fellow passengers when using your cell phone—on land or sea, for that matter. It really is discourteous to yell into your cell phone louder than you would if you were chatting with another human being. There's such a thing as noise pollution and don't be part of it. Besides, you'll run into these same people over and over again throughout

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the cruise and you don't want to be embarrassed or considered a big jerk.

Like I keep saying, it's your cruise, but if your behavior gets too out-of-hand, you may be requested to leave the dining room or the ship, for that matter. Yes, it's your cruise but it's also run by the Captain and he has the final say.

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Tip #36: Don't bring your own booze.

Before you decide to bring your own booze—which some cruise lines will confiscate—check out some of the in-stateroom amenities. And may I mention that you're on vacation—enjoy the cruise ship services and don't haul your blender all the way from home to grind up ice and make home-made drinks. Shall I repeat this? You're on vacation. Being pampered, waited on, served is all part of vacation. After all, isn't that why you booked a cruise? If you want to do it yourself, pitch a tent or stay in a Motel 6.

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Tip #37: Learn to identify the crew by their stripes.

No, this section isn't called "Swearing like a Sailor," although you may find yourself doing so when wondering who is who. I mean, you know how to get things done on land at a Hyatt, but what's the story here?

The ship may seem like a land-based resort hotel, but do not forget that you are on a ship. This ship is subject to maritime laws, including lifeboat drills and being in the care of naval officers. It's wise to get to know the players a bit. Just who are these men in uniform anyway? How can you tell them apart? And I don't mean so you can attract the top dog.

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Here's the way it all stacks up on Princess ships:

The Captain is in command of your ship and is your official host for the cruise. He is assisted by the ship's officers and staff, who are organized into departments. You can recognize an officer's department by the color of epaulet worn on his or her shoulders.

The Deck Department, headed by the staff Captain, is responsible for all the duties performed by the officers manning the bridge. These seasoned professionals are distinguished by their black and gold epaulet. Safety and security fall under the jurisdiction of the Deck Department as does the maintenance of the ship's appearance. Members of the Deck Department paint the ship and keep the decks and

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swimming pools clean. In short, the Staff Captain and his crew are the people in charge of keeping your vessel shipshape throughout your cruise.

The Chief Technical Officer heads the Engine Department and is assisted by the Staff Engineer Officer and Staff Electro-Technical Officer. Departmental responsibilities include the ship's propulsion system, climate control and power generation. The Staff Electro-Technical Officer deals with electrical distribution and the ship's satellite and radio communications. Engineering Officers and Electro-Technical Officers wear the burgundy and gold epaulet.

You'll recognize members of the Hotel Department by the white and gold epaulet on their uniforms. The

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Passenger Services Director is in charge, along with the Staff Purser and First Purser. The Purser's staff handles all of the hotel responsibilities for the entire ship—from stateroom, public room and dining room services to providing all food and supplies for passengers and crew. This department also includes a number of officers who don't wear an epaulet, such as the Maître'd, who maintains the excellent standards of service in all dining areas, and the Executive Chef, who supervises all food production onboard.

The Cruise Director reports to the Passenger Services Director and is also a senior officer onboard ship. The Cruise Director manages the entire Entertainment Department. Since the Cruise Director and cruise staff oversee so many different activities, from

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evening stage shows to leading daytime and evening activities, their uniforms change to fit the occasion. Like all onboard employees, cruise staff always have a gold name badge on their uniform so you can get to know them right away.

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Tip #38: Take precautions to stay healthy and safe on a cruise.

Is cruising healthy? I hear about sickness onboard, people getting drunk and falling overboard, and worse.

In recent years, the Norwalk Virus breakouts onboard cruise ships has been in the news. Often, people are sick when they arrive on the ship and spread it through the other passengers, especially by eating at the buffet. Sickness is usually spread through contact with other people, especially in close quarters, such as airplanes and cruise ships.

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Other situations in the news have been reports of people missing, falling overboard, or trouble in ports. There are several things you can do to remain healthy on a cruise:

- Don't over drink
- Don't over eat—this may not be the time to try too rich of a food. The first time I tried Duck a 'laOrange, I got sick. It may be best to play it safe with foods you know you can handle.
- Don't be alone—especially if you're a woman. Stay with other people onboard the ship, don't go to crew's quarters, or wander off by yourself anywhere in port.
- Get plenty of rest

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- Book shore excursions as part of a cruise tour
- Wash hands often

But if I do get sick, what can I do?

You can visit the infirmary. The medical staff, headed by the Senior Doctor, are on call 24-hours a day, seven days a week to provide medical care for both passengers and crew. This team of highly qualified doctors and nurses may be identified by their red and gold epaulet.

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Tip #39: The infirmary is not included as part of the cruise fare.

Just like any doctor's office on land, any medical services you obtain at the infirmary have a separate charge. If you buy the cruise insurance, it may cover many medical conditions and services.

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Tip #40: You don't have to be bored on a ship, but you may have to manage your time.

When I first started cruising, there was one pool and several games such as bingo scheduled throughout the day. There weren't any gyms, and exercise classes were held around the pool. Ships today have more activities scheduled than what any one passenger can participate in.

They still have bingo but there are other activities, such as wine tasting, napkin folding, or art auctions, shopping arcades, spa treatments.

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Tip #41: Attend the art auctions if you must but don't think you're getting a great deal on a fabulous piece of art.

I recommend skipping them. Enough said.

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Tip #42: Don't spend too much time in the sun out by the pool.

Most ships have more than one pool with poolside activities. Some are exposed to the sun, some are undercover, some have a retractable dome, some are swim against the current, some have pool slides. At least one will have pool games.

While some cruise ships have a topless deck (Carnival), going topless is frowned up by most cruise lines. Just ask Sandy Brown in [Real Women Wear Red](#). However, clothing optional beaches may be available in certain cruise ports. You can research these on the Internet.

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But whatever you do, don't burn that tender skin that's used to being covered. I've done it and it's not pleasant. Don't say you haven't been warned.

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Tip #43: Choose your nightlife carefully.

Every cruise features lavish productions with some of the largest casts at sea, performing today's Broadway hits and long-running classics. There's also dancing, karaoke, and comedy shows. There are also special party nights.

On my cruise in [Real Women Wear Red](#), there was Country & Western night. You should have seen the Aussie waiter—was he hot—too bad he was gay. Other popular nights on cruise ships are Tropical Night and Mexican Fiesta night. Evening cocktails in one of the ship's cozy lounges or swanky bars is a perfect place to meet up with shipboard friends and swap stories about the afternoon's adventures. There are also

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movies, TV, and DVDs to check out for some cabins on some ships.

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Tip #44: You don't have to get off the ship in every port—You don't even need a shore excursion.

Whether you book an excursion or wander on your own depends on the port and whether there's an activity you're interested in. If you do want an excursion, I recommend booking through the cruise line. You'll be traveling among your fellow passengers, and should there be any trouble, such as arriving back at the dock late, the ship will wait for you.

While you can sometimes save money booking your own excursions, it's just not worth it. The last thing you want to do is arrive too late back at the dock, miss the ship, and fly to the next port

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on your own dime. Not everybody is as lucky as I was when I almost missed the ship in Cozumel. Thankfully, my Cary Grant rescued me.

And, whatever you do, don't think that you don't have to be back onboard ship by a certain time. You will and the ship will leave without you if you're not on it. Don't think you can hang out in the port and somehow the ship will be there when you're ready to get back onboard. You wouldn't believe how many times people have made this mistake.

Repeat: the ship will leave without you if you're not onboard when it sails. It's best to reboard early and prepare to join in with the other passengers at the sailaway party, if you're still in the mood to socialize.

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Tip #45: Read your daily newsletter.

All ships have a newsletter. In the case of Princess, it's called the *Princess Patter*. This is your daily schedule of ship activities and entertainment events. It's also your guide to shipboard services with hours of operation. Princess Patter is delivered nightly to your stateroom. Keep it close at hand, so you'll always know what's happening and where.

Some cruise lines have no announcements and the only way to know what's going on is to read about it in the newsletter.

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Tip #46: Play it safe with the crew and other passengers.

Don't go anywhere with a crew member or be alone.

I wouldn't recommend getting involved with the crew. There have been too many reports of things going wrong for women who have done so. In fact, I wouldn't recommend being anywhere alone on a cruise or port, for that matter.

The reality is when you're onboard a ship and certainly a port, you're in a foreign country without the usual rights and protection. You can't be too cautious, either with other passengers,

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the crew, and especially when it comes to imbibing alcohol.

Play it safe, don't be alone, don't wander into non-passenger areas, and don't over-indulge in alcohol.

Even if you're traveling with somebody—a spouse even—don't spend time away from one another. On my first cruise, my ex-husband played bingo all day while I relaxed out by the pool, which sent the wrong signal to the bar waiter.

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Tip #47: Be cautious with shipboard romances.

You've just met somebody and you seem to be getting a little too close too fast. Is it the real thing? There's only one way to find out. Don't get too close too fast. Have a good time getting to know one another in the company of others and exchange contact information—email is the safest thing—and get to know each other back on land, out of the vacation mindset.

And whatever you do, don't get off the ship alone, go to a local bar, and pick up strange men. Unfortunately, too many women have been this stupid and have been sorry.

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Staying in Touch

Tip #48: The Internet cafes are a great way to keep in touch back home.

Internet access is available on all mass market cruises. Princess ships have 24-hour onboard Internet Cafés and wireless network with state-of-the-art computer systems to access your web-based e-mail account, or browse the Internet for world news, sports and stock trading. Or you can bring your wireless-enabled laptop and access the Internet from the Purser's Lobby/ Atrium and the surrounding lounges and bars. If your laptop is already equipped, wireless network cards are available for purchase onboard.

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Passengers who subscribe to e-mail services from an Internet Service Provider (ISP) are advised to verify that their ISP has a web-mail viewing site prior to sailing. Most major ISPs have websites that allow mail access via a web browser using an e-mail address and password.

You can check with the Passenger Services/Purser's Desk onboard for information regarding the charges that apply to Internet and wireless services and any other specific requirements.

Ship Internet access is not guaranteed at all times due to the nature of satellite communications, which are subject to itinerary and possible disruption from weather patterns and various obstructions. Also, Internet access via satellite is significantly

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slower than high-speed connections on shore.

So, do not fear, Internet is definitely here. You can keep in touch with friends, family, kids, pets, and even work. But be careful about that last one. They might just put you to work on your vacation.

And don't forget to exchange email addresses with the new friends you've met, especially if you think you've found a love interest.

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Tip #49: The cruise ends on the last night.

This may, at first, sound like an obvious statement. But here's the story. You disembark from the ship on the 8th morning. You may think your vacation is still in full swing that morning. But don't be fooled—it ended the night before when you were asked to place your luggage outside your cabin in the middle of the night. Service, as you have known it for 7 days, has now ended.

If you want to maximize your last day, be sure to do it well before the last night when you'll be caught up packing, saying good-bye, tipping, etc. Make sure you have that last drink, meal,

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dance, and exchange email addresses well before it's time to pack it up and go home.

After this the crew will be all business. They will serve you some sort of breakfast—usually a muffin, juice, and coffee and everything else will be closed to you. The cruise is officially over. From this point on, you are just baggage that they need to get off the ship as quickly as possible so they can load the next group of cruisers.

Everybody will be racing around trying to achieve just that, so don't look to chat with that friendly bartender or hope he'll serve you one last drink. Don't think your cabin steward is there to make special requests. Remember, the cruise officially ended the night

before. Right now, you are just cargo that they can't wait to get rid of.

Besides, your head is probably busy thinking about that flight home, how you'll get to the airport, and those nagging responsibilities you left behind. So don't be surprised and don't judge the cruise by this rushed experience. Just reflect back on the fabulous week you've just had and book another one when you get back home, if you haven't done so already.

And the more time goes by, the more you'll realize you really have just had the time of your life. It's been a fabulous cruise, after all.

Love,
Cyn

Resources

Mass Market Cruise Line Web Addresses:

<http://www.carnival.com>
<http://www.royalcaribbean.com>
<http://www.ncl.com>
<http://www.princess.com>
<http://www.celebrity.com>
<http://www.hollandamerica.com>
<http://disneycruiselines.com>

Cruise Boards:

<http://www.cruisemates.com>
<http://www.cruicecritic.com>
<http://www.passporter.com>
<http://www.castawayclub.com>

Cruise Fiction:

[*Real Women Wear Red*](#)

Other Fiction by Kathy Holmes:

[*The Tom Jones Club*](#)
[*Letters on Balboa Island*](#)
[*Viva Las Vegas*](#)
[*Cougars in Cabo*](#)
[*As the Bullets Drop*](#)