

Cruise News

Special points of interest:

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- > Best cabins



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A recent Princess Cruise Experience

I'm actually writing this article from my cabin on the Island Princess. We are sailing the West coast of Mexico after having come thru the Panama Canal a few days ago on our way to Los Angeles from Ft. Lauderdale. This happens to be my first time aboard a Princess ship, and I am really enjoying it.

I would put princess and Royal Caribbean where I've sailed most, on par with one another. Overall the friendliness of the crew on Princess is a bit better than Royal Caribbean but all other aspects in their entirety pretty much.

I could easily write a check list of many items and then give plus or minus marks for each line and would likely find

that overall they are a virtual tie.

This particular cruise because of the length (14 nights) and the destination attracted an older average age crowd. In fact there are only four kids under 18 on the ship and I suspect all are 12 or under. They have been quite well behaved anytime I've seen them in fact better than some of the adults on board.

Today Princess held the 5k walk for the cure which is held on a sea day. The turn out was not huge Apparently most folks donated and chose not to walk. I participated and really enjoyed the event. It is for a great cause (Royal Caribbean supports Make A Wish Foundation.)

Overall Princess has fantastic offerings for families and couples alike. They have significant experience in Alaska and even operates three of their own lodges for pre/post cruise land tour. I recommend anyone sailing to Alaska spend a few days there before or after the cruise.

Princess offers a number of longer itineraries which tend to include ports not often visited by other cruise lines with is quite a plus for those who want to see more of the world. If you have yet to plan your Summer vacation there is still time for us to help you plan a cruise and find you a great deal on select Princess sailings for Summer and Fall.

Picking the best cruise.

There are so many cruise options today. We even see lots of sales in select destinations this year. With all the choice how do you pick the right cruise? Ultimately, you pretty much already know the answer. It is personal to your needs.

Every cruise, ship, or cruise

line does not fit every passenger profile. In fact the lines compete for, in many cases, different demographics and tastes.

If you want to be highly active and surrounded by younger people that is going to bring into play different ships and cruises than someone who

wants a quiet crowd. If you want smaller less visited ports that again is different than going where everyone always goes.

It is best to get help from a trained and knowledgeable agent like ourselves to help you pick your next cruise.

Why Cruise?

When discussing vacations with people I often get the question; why cruise? The answer is pretty simple. Cruising is one of the ultimate mostly "all-inclusive" vacations.

Cruising allows you to see several different destinations with your hotel and restaurant in tow. You are provided with onboard entertainment as part of the cruise fare. There are typically gyms and other activities in which you can participate. Most food is abundant and has no extra charge.

Cruises offer the opportunity to

use the same ship and see different destinations sometimes on consecutive sailings and other times during different seasons. This is nice when you build a relationship with the crew and get all of your special requests met without even having to ask.

Many ships have crew who stay for years and they manage to remember past guests very well. The welcome back is well beyond what you find at most land based hotels or resorts.

Those who cruise generally enjoy it. Most of the time the ship rides calmly thru the seas and when

weather gets rough, stabilizers can be deployed to help cut ship roll.

The ship or travel agent arranges the shore excursions, can arrange pre and post cruise hotel stays and air transportation as well as transfers from the ship to the airport and vice versa. All of this is for some cruise lines all part of the base cruise fare.

Cruising is generally all inclusive so one point of contact and one payment can take care of virtually all aspects of your vacation.



Find neat doorways while walking thru Old San Juan.

See the Atlantis Island Resort while visiting the Nassau area of the Bahamas.

There is plenty for all family members there.

Transiting the Panama Canal

The Panama Canal is an amazing engineering project that makes cargo and passenger transportation easier and exciting. The canal saves a couple weeks on the US Coast to Coast sailings.

Most trans-canal cruises are actually to reposition ships to and from the Alaskan market. These cruises are often priced very well and offer stops not often made by other cruises. Costa Rica and Columbia are

two such countries. Princess offers an overnight stay in Panama on most cruises allowing folks to further explore the wonderful Tropical country.

Most cruises offer shore excursions either while the ship transits (which is not to be missed) or during the all day visit to Panama. For those who haven't ever been to Panama, a shore excursion to see the country is a great idea, with its diverse foliage and animal life. Half day

canal partial transit and history tours are also a great option. I did that last time in Panama so this time was able to enjoy the transit with knowledge from before to help me understand the canal story. The ship had an on-board lecturer providing commentary and guide passengers as we transited the canal. It is a cruise everyone should take. Often these sailings are bargain prices.

Sailing Alaskan Waters

Sailing to Alaska is an exciting event. You can see many animals you generally don't see in other states and beautiful scenery. There are also several glaciers to see in Alaska. Those sailing in Alaska get an opportunity to take incredible shore excursions. Fishing, wildlife viewing, dogsled tours atop glaciers, helicopter rides to see unique scenery are all among the excursions in Alaska. These are some key reasons people

sail Alaskan cruises. Many people who cruise there also make extended visits where they can see the Alaskan interior as well. Cruise-tours are very popular and highly recommended. We have been to Alaska several times. Most often we go and enjoy land based activities including seeing family. We sailed the inside passage which is an incredible experience. We spent lots of time keeping eyes on the shoreline watching abundant

wildlife and were rewarded with both land based and sea based animals.

When you cruise to Alaska be sure to pack for variations in weather. Also pack your video and still cameras since there are many opportunities to capture great images.

There are still bargains for 2012, and great cabins for 2013. See our cruise reviews: <http://www.BrooksCruiseServices.com/ourreviews.html>

See the beautiful mountains in Alaska.



Sailing around the Middle East

The Middle East is becoming a popular tourist destination. The focal point for the tourism tends to be the United Arab Emirates specifically Dubai. Part of this comes from Emirates Airlines flying all over the world with Dubai as their only hub airport. That coupled with special stopover deals in Dubai it's hard to skip this destination.

Cruise have sailed there but, recently have become more interested than before basing cruises out of Dubai or making one or two day stops there. Ships sailing from Dubai offer easy access to flights in and out of the departure port. Also, they offer some really exotic ports

of call during cruises. Most cruises are one week and visit other parts of the Emirates and neighboring countries. Muscat, Oman is one of the more interesting ports to visit. On the longer sailings, India is often among the countries added during the additional days.

For those sailing to ports in Oman and the UAE, you do need to keep in mind that there are cultural customs that need to be followed when visiting tourist sites. It is not at all like stopping in Caribbean ports where wearing a bikini thru the streets is allowed, your dress has to be far more moderate or conservative.

Middle Eastern foods are not to be missed

as many are very good and unlike what you normally eat at home. If you like dates you are in luck as they grow in the Middle East and taste great. Additionally, the architecture is stunning. It is a very different world there compared to where most cruise ship stop.

Dune bashing is one of the exciting adventure outside of Dubai. The fantastic dinner and belly dancing show while on the dune bashing night safari is quite an exciting experience. For the adventurous a Middle East Cruise should be on the travel bucket list. We can help you plan such a trip sharing first hand knowledge of the region.

Flying to your cruise departure port

For many cruisers they have no choice but to fly to the departure port for the cruise. This is due to distance from home, limited time, or in the case of one way cruises having to start somewhere different than where you end the cruise. For these cruisers flying is just a prelude to the cruise adventure, and can at times enhance or put a damper on the cruise experience.

Flying these days is tedious for most travelers. Luggage restrictions, new security measures, and the higher cost of flying all

add to what annoys many travelers.

Things that should be considered when planning your flight to the cruise. First, if at all possible arrive the day before the cruise not the morning of embarkation. If anything goes wrong coming in the day of the cruise, can cause you to miss the departure and typically it will be on your dime to catch up with the ship if that is even possible. The cruise line also does not wait for you, unless perhaps you are with a bunch of cruisers on

air they booked for you.

Ideally, plan a non-stop flight. If you must connect try to connect in airports that are less frequently impacted by bad weather delays. If you want a chance at being rebooked on another airline if there is trouble, pick an airline with partner airlines.

Pack as light as possible, putting all important things in your carry on luggage. Cruise tickets and passports especially go in your carry on. Also, if you fly in the day of, buy travel insurance.

Combine an African Safari while visiting and helping Orphans in Africa or helping to expand the reach of faith based hospitals in Africa.

More Old World Sights when cruising Europe.



Picking the Ideal Cruise Cabin

The ideal cabin on a cruise will vary depending on who you ask. It may also vary from one cruise destination to the next. It really is a personal choice.

My ideal cabin is one with a balcony, but it could be a standard balcony cabin if I am alone or up to a big suite if my whole family is with me and we have other family or fiends aboard the ship as well. My parents generally want a mini-suite or a full suite when they sail. My daugh-

ter is happy in any cabin that is aboard the ship.

Many people say they use their cabin only for sleeping. That is seldom true, but some folks do spend all of their vacation time out by the pool, or dining, or sleeping. For them an inexpensive inside cabin may be just fine. Others need the light of day but can't swing the cost of a balcony cabin so opt instead for an ocean view cabin.

When sailing thru the Panama

Canal or the fjords of Norway, New Zealand or the Icy Straits of Alaska a balcony allows lots of viewing from your home at sea. During a port intensive sailing in the Mediterranean or the Southern Caribbean any cabin may do well if you will be in port all day and enjoying public venues on the ship while aboard.

Pick based on the cruise and your personal tastes and budget. We can assist you pick a cabin for your cruise.

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Brooks Cruise Services provides expert guidance in planning your vacation experience to include pre and post cruise planning as well as shipboard and port excursions.

With many cruises sailed personally to various parts of the world we have actual knowledge of these products.

We strive to provide a vacation experience that is beyond your expectations.

Driving to your cruise departure port

This is one topic I hear debated often. Being able to drive to the cruise port is a personal preference for me, because it makes so many aspects of the cruise experience much easier. Of course driving to cruise departure points may not always be as practical as desired.

The debate over flying in or driving in has proponents from all corners. No one side is completely right with the others wrong, it is a function of different points of view. There is also the reality that more often than not as people want to see different parts of the world by cruise ship they will have to travel by plane at least some of the time. Not all destinations are within an easy drive for most of the population. Most US based cruisers tend to cruise out of US based ports and that is where there is a focus on driving to the ports. For many people being able to quickly drive to the port makes getting to and from the ship a much simpler process.

Flying has become more of a hassle these

days with luggage fees and weight restrictions. Fewer flights often flying much fuller than in the past all come together to make people more aware of alternative ways to get to the cruise.

For those who live within five or six hours from a cruise port, often it is actually almost as quick to drive from your house as it is to drive to a nearby airport, fly, and then transfer to the cruise port. For this population the decision to drive or fly is often almost exclusively a function of how much luggage is going along with expense of driving versus flying. Driving almost always wins out.

A number of folks are willing to spend a day driving especially when there is a family going because of the expected cost savings generated by driving instead of flying. Of course driving for a day to get to the cruise pretty much as with flying requires driving in the day before the cruise and an obligatory pre-departure hotel stay.

By driving to the port you tend to miss

weather delays that cause aircraft problems. You also have the ability to pretty much take whatever luggage you want with you. The added perk of lots of luggage is that on return you can bring back lots of duty free booze without having to worry about it being smashed by baggage handlers at the airport on the flight home. You can better control when you head to the ship or get off the ship on return to the cruise terminal.

The control and cost savings have led to many individuals deciding that driving is the only way to go regardless of the amount of time they have to spend driving. For others time is too valuable to be spent in a car so they opt to go via plane and just deal with the luggage restrictions etc. Personally I've gone by car and plane, even out of the same ports. There are benefits to both sides, but having a car and knowing I will get there is always a bit more comforting, at least until the plane lands safely at the cruise departure port.