

Cruise News

Special points of interest:

- > Joining a group cruise
- > Travel Insurance for Cruisers
- > Cruising from various ports
- > Holiday cruises



Group Cruises, are they for me?

There are several kinds of group cruises. There are groups of like minded people where the group will get together to do things while on the cruise. Other groups are put together to get better rates and extra perks for those in the group.

If you have a group of friends or families who may want to sail together, sailing as a group often will have some rewards. Public space on the ship can be reserved for group events (some restrictions apply) so your group can do things together. If the group is big enough it may even garner recognition from the Captain or Cruise Director at various times. Groups from yacht clubs, women's groups and

groups of friends or family are great for cruises.

The groups sometimes get better rates and free amenities. Many kinds of groups exist. Promotional groups typically do not hold any on-board events but exist for the economic benefit of the group members. These groups are a great way for families looking for one or two cabins to pick up some savings and amenities. The amenities range from onboard spending credit to bottles of wine, meals in the specialty dining venues, or even in some cases prepaid gratuities.

We work with both kinds of groups. Group leaders who come to us for our expertise with groups may receive addi-

tional perks for themselves or for the entire group. The larger a group grows typically the amenities can grow with the group as well. For those passengers who need a cabin, we will do our best to put them into one of our groups for the economic savings where possible. When we do this, it is for the benefit of passengers and there are no requirements to do anything with the group.

Ultimately either kind of group will usually garner a bit of a better deal (bottom line) for the cruising passengers. That is why we do recommend using group cruises where possible to help improve the overall cruise experience.

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Travel insurance, why you should have it.

Once you pick your destination and we help you book that dream vacation, it's important to protect your investment against unforeseen circumstances. To that end we strongly recommend using a travel insurance product that covers your full trip, and also covers pre-existing conditions.

This offers piece of mind that if something does go wrong you have help covering the expenses and other needed assistance.

Travel Insurance can pay if you miss the trip for covered reasons, help cover costs of missed connections, delayed flights, missed ships (catching

up at the next port) lost luggage and many more things. Of course on the Medical side they can provide coverage for care outside the country and pay for necessary medical evacuations which can otherwise cost you tens of thousands of dollars.

Sailing from San Juan

For those who want a great destination for their departure port, San Juan, Puerto Rico is a great option. You can easily spend several days enjoying the beach and rain forest nearby before or after your cruise. San Juan is a relatively easy flight for most people in the USA, two and a half hours from Miami.

In San Juan there are plenty of name brand hotels for those who are picky about where they stay. These hotels cover a wide price range as well. They can be booked via our agency or as part of the cruise package. Hotels

booked as a part of the cruise are generally more expensive than rates we can secure. They may however include transportation to and from the ship which otherwise is priced separately. Taxis are fairly priced in San Juan and tend to be readily available to get you around.

Old Town San Juan is definitely worth a half to full day of your time touring around. My daughter found a nice shop she liked from back home and marked the occasion by getting her ears pierced there, which is a fond memory for her of the San Juan visit. You can

visit various local dining establishments as well.

You should know though, if departing on a cruise from San Juan, almost all of those cruises depart from the more remote pier. It is relatively easy to catch a taxi to the pier to board the ship. Coming off the ship you may encounter a line for taxi's but they swing thru and pick up people all the time so your taxi will be there. Just plan enough time before flying back home.

The pier in Old San Juan tends to be only for ships on a port call, not on a turn around day.



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.

Bahamas Weekend Cruises—A great way to try cruising!

Are you looking for a quick weekend getaway? One of the best options is sailing out of Florida on the three night cruises.

Several cruise lines offer these sailings. Generally though, all of the ships end up visiting Nassau as well as a private island in the Bahamas. They try to avoid having all of the ships in Nassau at the same time, but regardless you will have plenty

of fun on the trip.

The ships used for these itineraries are some of the older smaller ships, however they are in good shape and offer plenty for everyone to do.

These shorter weekend cruises tend to lend themselves, regardless of the cruise line, to a younger crowd. This crowd also tends to spend more time enjoying the party atmosphere so you will generally find more

drinking on these weekend cruises. That said ship security does a good job of keeping everyone in line.

These weekend cruises are not necessarily the least expensive cruises you can find, however they are typically quite well priced. If you are looking for a lower cost cruise often the weekly cruises Monday to Friday visiting the Bahamas are less expensive.

Sailing from Galveston

For millions of folks living in many of the largest cities in the United States, Galveston is a great place to start your cruise. Most of these are within a six hour drive which is a reasonable distance for someone driving in the morning of the cruise. This can help cut down on travel costs as you can drive in the morning of the cruise and avoid the pre-cruise hotel stay. In addition to the convenience

for so many to arrive and cruise, Galveston holds a lot of small city charm for those who want to visit a night or more. There are beaches as well as many other tourist sites in Galveston. For those with an eye towards history, Galveston was the Ellis Island of the South serving as the entry point for tons of immigrants into the USA.

Galveston is easy to reach by air as Houston with its two airports

is just a short drive away. Depending on the airport you use you are forty-five to ninety minutes from the island. There are shuttle vans that run to Galveston to allow you to leave the driving to someone else. With hotels for all budgets and plenty of great places to eat you can easily fill several days with fun things to do in Galveston.

See the beautiful mountains in Alaska.



Cruising Safety and how to safely enjoy your vacation cruise

Cruises are one of the safest ways to travel. In addition to traveling you get to see various ports of call around specific regions or on longer cruises segments of and up to the entire world. Cruise safety has been in the news a lot lately.

Because I am often asked is cruising safe, I wanted to address that question here in the newsletter. Cruising is very safe. You however must remain on watch as you would at home or in a land resort to keep an eye out for dangerous situations and avoid them.

A recent change for cruising mandates that every cruise ship conduct a safety drill prior to departing (like you see hap-

pen on airplanes before each trip). The key there is to pay attention to where you need to go in an emergency and understand how to don a lifejacket. Knowing these things helps you should an emergency ever arise which is incredibly rare. Personal safety is also important on a cruise, or any vacation for that matter. Everyone has to consider that being on vacation and specifically a ship does not negate the need to maintain an attitude that bad things can happen anywhere keeping your eye out for ways to avoid conflicts or other trouble.

Parents taking kids on cruises should make sure their children understand

ground rules for personal safety from home apply on the ship as well. Going into strangers' cabins is one big danger that should be avoided, likewise the kids should not invite strangers into their own cabins. Children should not be alone with a crew member anywhere on the ship, there should always be other adults or kids present.

Most cruise lines have curfews for children. They also have strong rules about guest misbehavior especially under-aged alcohol consumption. Following the rules helps keep the vacation fun for all passengers.

Mission Trip-Vacation

Do you have a heart for mission work, helping others in need around the world? There are many areas where you can go and vacation and add on a mission work component. Some mission trips even add on a day or two of fun as part of the program.

One of the popular destinations for those who like to do some mission work as well as vacation is Africa. Go on an African Safari and either before or after spend some time working on mission

projects. There are many projects associated with church sponsored hospitals as well as outreach programs to provide water and other needs to rural communities in Africa.

Many spots in the Caribbean also have mission projects where you can go work to help those in need while enjoying some vacation time. Alaska is another region rich with opportunities to serve those in need while also visiting great sights along the way. It ultimately is a

matter of searching out a volunteer or mission opportunity in the area you want to visit.

The first step in the process is picking your vacation destination. Then you go to your church and find out what they know about opportunities in the area of the world you plan to visit. You may also want to reach out to other churches you know. Typically with a few calls you can isolate a project that needs your help.

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

Christmas Cruises

Our family has twice sailed on Christmas Cruises. Both were great cruise experiences. Not only did you get away from the hustle and bustle of the commercial side of the holiday back home, so you can spend more quality time with family, you get a full cruise experience as well. In each case it enhanced our enjoyment of the overall trip. The kids don't have to worry about missing Santa Clause as

he stops at all cruise ships long enough to visit with the kids and hand out gifts. He is great about letting any family member get their picture with him. Often the Captain and Hotel Director will also be there to greet the families who show up to visit with Santa.

The food on the holiday cruises does take on a bit of a holiday theme, with special meals on Christmas day. There are also

special food items served for Chanukah as well if it falls during the same cruise. There will be Christmas Caroling and other activities that tend to be Christmas oriented.

You will not miss out on Christmas cookies as they tend to show up as a cookie of the day option. You may even get an opportunity to bake with the crew some special cookies.

More Old World Sights when cruising Europe.



Brooks Cruise Services

11606 Highgrove Dr
Houston, TX 77077

Phone: 713-429-1487
Fax: 281-946-5113
E-mail:
David@BrooksCruiseServices.com

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.

Walt Disney World

One of the Magical Spots to vacation is Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida. Our family enjoyed many trips there by road and air. We have gone via RV camping on WDW property and nearby at Thousand Trails. We have even plugged in a WDW vacation at the end of a cruise. Regardless of when we went or how we got there, we have had a great time visiting WDW each time.

WDW offers something for every member of the family. The Imagineers do a tremendous job of making sure the On Stage side of the show is always offering something fun and exciting not just for one age group but ultimately for all age groups. Disney is very concerned with ensuring that the show is "on" for guests at all time. In fact anytime their crew are in a position to be in contact with guests they are considered to be "on stage" and as such must act the part.

There are four different amusement parks and two huge water parks to enjoy

on the WDW property. Several hotels at different price points and amenity levels are part of the WDW product. There are also nearby partner and non-partner hotels from virtually every brand available. A number of camping venues are also available. Virtually all price points are covered as are different kinds of accommodations. Budget hotels right up to luxury homes for rent can be found nearby WDW property. Staying on the WDW property is hard to beat because you may use many additional transportation options. With hotels and the Ft. Wilderness campground available you can find something you like. They even have condos available for rent at their fractional ownership properties. Of course these are WDW run properties so you can expect the WDW level of service at all of them.

The four theme parks offer a different experience one from the other. The oldest is the Magic Kingdom, which is constantly updated to offer new exciting rides. Many

are themed around Disney Classic feature films and/or starring roles. The EPCOT park was set up to show the "future" and for those of us who have been there many times over time, know some of the future they portrayed years ago is here now. Disney Studios is a great place to learn more about the film industry and see a lot of fun rides and shows. Animal Kingdom is great as well. Don't miss the Kilimanjaro Safari Ride. Also, watch out for the Yedi on the Mount Everest ride. It is one of the neatest rollercoaster rides I've ever experienced.

When play time is over at the parks, you return to your WDW property hotel and the show is on there. At Ft. Wilderness you will find campfire activities with Disney Characters among the activities. You can also enjoy the Disney Dining plan and really have a great time experiencing different meal options each day both in the resorts and the parks. These dining packages are a great value, ask us about them!