

The Ultimate Cruise Planning Checklist

Complete Planning & Packing Guide by Sojournica™

Print this out, save it to your phone, or work through it digitally before every cruise. Check things off as you go, your future self will thank you.



THE 6-MONTH CRUISE PLANNING TIMELINE



6 MONTHS BEFORE DEPARTURE

Booking Phase

This is your action window for getting the best prices and securing your preferred ship/cabin.

- ☐ **Book your cruise** (6–9 months before departure = lowest fares)
- ☐ Research cruise lines and destinations (read reviews, compare itineraries)
- ☐ Check passport expiry (needs 6+ months validity beyond return date)
- ☐ Apply for any required visas for port destinations
- ☐ Book your flights (set price alerts, book 2–3 months out for best fares)
- ☐ Research travel insurance options (compare Seven Corners, Allianz, etc.)
- ☐ Register with your government's travel advisory system (STEP for US travelers, etc.)
- ☐ Join the cruise line's loyalty program
- ☐ Download your cruise line's mobile app (familiarize yourself)
- ☐ Research and shortlist pre/post-cruise hotels if needed
- ☐ Save the cruise line's customer service number

Insider tip: Book specialty dining 6 months out if available. Popular restaurants sell out fast.



3 MONTHS BEFORE DEPARTURE

Planning Phase

This is when you lock in your experiences and start detailed planning.

- [] Finalize pre/post-cruise hotel bookings
- [] Reserve specialty dining (first-come, first-served on most lines)
- [] Book shore excursions **through Viator/Klook** (20–40% cheaper than ship prices)
 - Viator: <https://viator.tpx.lv/UoBskuR1>
 - Klook: <https://klook.tpx.lv/ZA5ANdmr>
- [] Research port destinations (what to see, where to eat, safety tips)
- [] Book any special services (spa packages, photo packages, etc.) if offered early-bird discounts
- [] Arrange airport transfers or parking at the port
- [] Check luggage requirements for your cruise line
- [] Start creating a packing list based on destination + season
- [] Purchase travel insurance (if you haven't already)
 - Seven Corners (cruise-specific): sojournica.com/go/cruise-insurance
- [] Check vaccination requirements for your destinations
- [] Notify your bank/credit card company of travel dates

Insider tip: Book excursions early. The best tours sell out 2–3 months before departure.



1 MONTH BEFORE DEPARTURE

Prep Phase

This is when you finalize everything and start packing prep.

- [] Finalize your budget using the Cruise Budget Planner worksheet (see below)
- [] Book any remaining shore excursions or activities
- [] Order any missing gear or clothing items you need
- [] Get your eSIM (activate before you leave)
 - Saily: <https://saily.tpx.lv/hggJrOGm>
 - Airalo: <https://airalo.tpx.lv/9gfzbvfO>
 - GigSky: <https://gigsky.tpx.lv/JXqebSoo>
- [] Download offline maps for your port cities (Google Maps, [Maps.me](https://www.maps.me/))
- [] Research local customs and etiquette for your destinations
- [] Arrange pet care or house sitter if needed
- [] Create a packing list (use the packing section below)
- [] Start buying any items you don't have (including scuba/underwater gear: sojournica.com/go/scuba)

- ☐ Check your travel insurance coverage details
- ☐ Confirm your flights with the airline
- ☐ Print or save all confirmations (cruise, flights, hotels, insurance)

Insider tip: Buy motion sickness remedies now. They're 3x more expensive onboard.

2 WEEKS BEFORE DEPARTURE

Final Prep

Details matter. Don't miss deadlines this week.

- ☐ Download your cruise line's mobile app (if not already done)
- ☐ Check in online with cruise line (opens 2 weeks prior)
- ☐ Check in online with airline(s) 24 hours before flight
- ☐ Confirm your specialty dining reservations
- ☐ Confirm your shore excursion bookings
- ☐ Print or save copies of all confirmations
- ☐ Activate your eSIM (not before, do it now)
 - Test it works on your phone
- ☐ Make copies of important documents (passport, insurance, etc.)
 - Keep one set in your carry-on, one in checked luggage, one emailed to yourself
- ☐ Notify someone at home of your full itinerary and contact details
- ☐ Set up automatic bill payments or pause subscriptions (if you'll be away long)
- ☐ Arrange for mail hold with post office
- ☐ Review your cruise line's dress code
- ☐ Check final weather forecast for destinations

Insider tip: Set up your onboard account on the app now so you have your cabin number and can explore the ship layout.

1 WEEK BEFORE DEPARTURE

Packing Week

This is packing week. Use the packing checklist below.

- ☐ Lay out all items you plan to pack

- ☐ Start packing non-daily items (formal wear, specialty gear, etc.)
- ☐ Check weather one final time
- ☐ Pack your carry-on with essentials:
 - Medications, valuables, documents, phone chargers, change of clothes, swimsuit
 - Anything you can't replace if your luggage is delayed
- ☐ Charge all electronics (phone, power bank, camera, etc.)
- ☐ Confirm gratuities are set up on your cruise account
- ☐ Print your boarding pass (or have it ready on your phone)
- ☐ Set your out-of-office email message
- ☐ Clean your house (you'll feel better returning to a clean space)
- ☐ Do laundry (so you don't return to a pile)
- ☐ Leave your house in order (lock windows, set timer for lights, etc.)

Insider tip: Pack only 70% of your luggage space on day 1. You might buy things at ports.

DAY BEFORE DEPARTURE

- ☐ Final packing, finish anything remaining
- ☐ Charge all electronics to 100%
- ☐ Confirm your travel insurance details are saved
- ☐ Print backup copies of all documents (or take screenshots)
- ☐ Confirm your ride to airport/port is arranged
- ☐ Set multiple alarms
- ☐ Lay out what you're wearing tomorrow
- ☐ Get a good night's sleep

Reminder: You've done everything right. Relax tonight.

EMBARKATION DAY

- ☐ Arrive at port 3–4 hours early (or follow cruise line guidance)
- ☐ Have all documents ready (passport, booking confirmation, ID)
- ☐ Activate your eSIM (if you haven't already)
- ☐ Find your cabin and unpack essentials
- ☐ Explore the ship
- ☐ Attend the muster drill (lifeboat safety, mandatory)

- [] Go to bed early (you'll need energy tomorrow)

CRUISE BUDGET PLANNER WORKSHEET

Use this to estimate costs BEFORE you book, then track actual costs as you go.

SECTION 1: GETTING THERE

Cost Category	Estimated	Actual
Outbound Flight	\$	\$
Return Flight	\$	\$
Airport Transfers	\$	\$
Pre-Cruise Hotel	\$	\$
Pre-Cruise Meals	\$	\$
SECTION 1 TOTAL	\$	\$

Budget Tips:

- **Flights:** Book 2–3 months in advance for best fares. Set price alerts on Google Flights.
- **Parking:** Compare long-term parking at airport vs. off-site parking vs. ride-share to port.
- **Pre-cruise hotel:** Only book if you have an early-morning flight. It's worth the cost.

SECTION 2: THE CRUISE ITSELF

Cost Category	Estimated	Actual
Cruise Fare	\$	\$
Taxes & Fees	\$	\$
Gratuities	\$	\$
Drink Package	\$	\$
Specialty Dining	\$	\$
Spa Services	\$	\$

Cost Category	Estimated	Actual
Onboard Misc.	\$	\$
Wi-Fi Package	\$	\$
SECTION 2 TOTAL	\$	\$

Budget Tips:

- **Cruise Fare:** This is your base. Compare multiple cruise lines.
- **Gratuities:** \$15–\$20 per person per day is standard. Some lines auto-include this.
- **Drink Package:** Not always worth it. Calculate: If you're averaging 2+ drinks/day at \$12–\$15 each, a package pays for itself.
- **Specialty Dining:** One dinner out per cruise is usually \$60–\$100 per person. Budget \$200–\$300 for a couple.
- **Onboard Spending:** Set a daily budget and stick to it. Tell your cabin steward your limit; they can help track it.

SECTION 3: SHORE EXCURSIONS (By Port)

Book through Viator/Klook, NOT the ship (20–40% cheaper).

Port	Activity	Estimated	Actual
Port 1		\$	\$
Port 2		\$	\$
Port 3		\$	\$
Port 4		\$	\$
Port 5		\$	\$
TOTAL		\$	\$

Budget Tips:

- **Book early:** Best tours sell out 2–3 months before.
- **Viator vs. Ship:** Viator excursion for same activity is usually \$200–\$300 cheaper for a group.
- **Skip some ports:** You don't have to do something at every port. Sea days at the pool are free and amazing.

- **Solo activities:** Not all excursions require booking. Walk the town, find local restaurants, explore independently.

SECTION 4: PORT SPENDING

Port	Meals	Shopping	Activities	Total
Port 1	\$	\$	\$	\$
Port 2	\$	\$	\$	\$
Port 3	\$	\$	\$	\$
Port 4	\$	\$	\$	\$
Port 5	\$	\$	\$	\$
TOTAL				\$

Budget Tips:

- **Meals at ports:** Eating at restaurants near the ship is always more expensive. Walk further for local, cheaper options.
- **Shopping:** Plan to buy souvenirs? Set a limit per port (\$30–\$50).
- **Cash vs. Card:** Carry some local cash for small vendors. Credit cards aren't accepted everywhere.
- **Port time:** Most ports give you 6–12 hours. You don't need to buy anything. Walking and exploring is free.

SECTION 5: TRAVEL INSURANCE

Item	Cost
Travel Insurance (cruise-specific)	\$
Medical Coverage	Included
Trip Cancellation	Included
Trip Delay	Included
Baggage Coverage	Included
INSURANCE TOTAL	\$

Budget Tips:

- **Cost:** Usually \$100–\$400 depending on cruise length and cost.
- **When to buy:** Within 2 weeks of cruise booking (unlocks better coverage).
- **Why it matters:** Medical evacuation at sea costs \$50,000+. Insurance costs \$200. Do the math.
- **What's covered:** Trip cancellation, medical emergencies, evacuation, lost luggage, travel delays.

Book here: <https://sojournica.com/go/cruise-insurance>

SECTION 6: GEAR & PREP

Item	Cost
New Clothing/Shoes	\$
Sunscreen & After-Sun	\$
Medications & Supplements	\$
eSIM (Saily, Airalo, or GigSky)	\$
Travel Insurance	\$
Miscellaneous Gear	\$
GEAR & PREP TOTAL	\$

Budget Tips:

- **eSIM:** Worth every penny. Get data at every port without surprising roaming charges.
 - Saily: <https://saily.tpx.lv/hggJrOGm>
 - Airalo: <https://airalo.tpx.lv/9gfzbvfO>
 - GigSky: <https://gigsky.tpx.lv/JXqebSoo>
- **Sunscreen:** Buy before the trip. Onboard costs 2–3x more.
- **Medications:** Bring everything you need. Cruise ship pharmacies are pricey and limited.
- **Scuba/Underwater Gear:** Browse options and get outfitted before your cruise:
<https://sojournica.com/go/scuba>

SECTION 7: BUFFER & EMERGENCY FUND

Item	Budget
Unexpected Expenses (10–15% of total)	\$

Item	Budget
Emergency Buffer	\$
BUFFER TOTAL	\$

Budget Tips:

- **The 10% rule:** Plan to spend 10–15% more than your estimate.
- **Emergency fund:** If your luggage is lost, you'll need to replace clothes, toiletries, medications.
- **Travel disruptions:** Flights get delayed, ships need repairs. Budget for flexibility.

TOTAL CRUISE COST BREAKDOWN

Section	Estimated	Actual
Getting There (Section 1)	\$	\$
The Cruise Itself (Section 2)	\$	\$
Shore Excursions (Section 3)	\$	\$
Port Spending (Section 4)	\$	\$
Travel Insurance (Section 5)	\$	\$
Gear & Prep (Section 6)	\$	\$
Buffer/Emergency (Section 7)	\$	\$
GRAND TOTAL	\$	\$

Per Person Cost (if traveling with others):

- Estimated: $\$ \div [\# \text{ of people}] = \$ \text{ per person}$
- Actual: $\$ \div [\# \text{ of people}] = \$ \text{ per person}$

Che's Budget Tip:

"I always budget 30% more than I think I'll spend. Then when I come in under budget, it feels like a win. And if I overspend a little, I'm not stressed because I planned for it. Budget generously, and you'll actually relax on the cruise instead of worrying about money."

 PACKING CHECKLIST (COMPLETE)

PRE-CRUISE PREP (Do These First)

- ☐ Book travel insurance (Seven Corners covers cruise cancellations, medical emergencies, evacuation: <https://sojournica.com/go/cruise-insurance>)
 - ☐ Check passport expiry (most cruise destinations require 6 months validity beyond your return date)
 - ☐ Apply for any required visas for port destinations
 - ☐ Register with your government's travel advisory system (e.g. STEP for US travelers)
 - ☐ Book pre/post cruise hotel if needed
 - ☐ Arrange airport transfers or parking at the port
 - ☐ Download your cruise line's app and check in online
 - ☐ Print or save boarding passes, e-tickets, and cabin confirmation
 - ☐ Set up your onboard account (credit card linked to cabin)
 - ☐ Pre-book specialty dining, shore excursions, and spa appointments
 - ☐ Notify your bank and credit card company of travel dates
 - ☐ Purchase any shore excursion tickets in advance (Viator and Klook often cheaper than ship)
 - ☐ Check luggage tag requirements for your cruise line
 - ☐ Arrange pet care or house sitter if needed
 - ☐ Pack a carry-on bag for embarkation day (your checked luggage may not arrive until evening)
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DOCUMENTS & MONEY

- ☐ Passport (check expiry!)
 - ☐ Visa documents (printed and digital copies)
 - ☐ Cruise booking confirmation
 - ☐ Travel insurance policy documents + emergency helpline number
 - ☐ Flight confirmation (outbound and return)
 - ☐ Hotel confirmation (pre/post cruise)
 - ☐ Shore excursion tickets/vouchers
 - ☐ Driver's license or secondary photo ID
 - ☐ Credit card(s), at least two, from different networks
 - ☐ Some local cash in the currencies of your port destinations
 - ☐ Loyalty program cards (cruise line, hotel, airline)
 - ☐ Emergency contacts list (written, not just saved in your phone)
 - ☐ Digital copies of all documents saved to cloud/email
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CLOTHING

Daytime / Casual

- ☐ T-shirts and casual tops (1 per day, plan for 2 sea days between ports)
- ☐ Shorts or lightweight pants
- ☐ Sundresses or casual dresses
- ☐ Swimsuit(s), at least two so one can dry
- ☐ Swim cover-up or sarong
- ☐ Light cardigan or long-sleeve layer (ships are cold inside)
- ☐ Comfortable walking shoes for ports
- ☐ Sandals or flip-flops for pool deck
- ☐ Athletic shoes (if using the gym or doing active excursions)

Formal / Smart Casual (check your cruise line's dress code)

- ☐ Formal outfit(s) for gala nights (dress, suit, or cocktail attire)
- ☐ Smart casual outfits for specialty dining
- ☐ Dress shoes or heeled sandals

Weather-Specific

- ☐ Rain jacket or packable poncho (essential for port days)
- ☐ Warm layer for Alaska, Northern Europe, or winter sailings
- ☐ Sun hat or cap
- ☐ Warm hat and gloves (cold weather itineraries)

Underwear & Sleepwear

- ☐ Underwear (1 per day + a few extra)
- ☐ Socks (including no-show socks for walking shoes)
- ☐ Pajamas or sleepwear
- ☐ Comfortable cabin loungewear

TOILETRIES & HEALTH

- ☐ Sunscreen, SPF 30 or higher (reef-safe for Caribbean/Pacific destinations)
- ☐ After-sun lotion or aloe vera gel
- ☐ Lip balm with SPF
- ☐ Shampoo and conditioner (cruise ships provide basics but often low quality)

- ☐ Body wash or soap
 - ☐ Deodorant
 - ☐ Moisturizer and facial skincare
 - ☐ Makeup and remover
 - ☐ Razor and shaving products
 - ☐ Toothbrush, toothpaste, floss
 - ☐ Hairbrush, comb, hair ties
 - ☐ Hair dryer (most cabins have one but low wattage, bring your own if needed)
 - ☐ Hair styling tools (check voltage compatibility for international trips)
 - ☐ Prescription medications (enough for the full trip plus a few extra days)
 - ☐ Motion sickness remedies (Sea-Bands, Dramamine, ginger chews)
 - ☐ Pain reliever (ibuprofen, paracetamol)
 - ☐ Antidiarrheal and antacid tablets
 - ☐ Antihistamines / allergy medication
 - ☐ First aid basics: plasters, antiseptic wipes, blister pads
 - ☐ Insect repellent (for tropical port destinations)
 - ☐ Feminine hygiene products
 - ☐ Contact lenses, solution, and glasses
 - ☐ Hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes
 - ☐ Face masks (optional but handy in crowded ports)
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TECH & ELECTRONICS

- ☐ Phone + charger
- ☐ eSIM activated before departure:
 - Saily: <https://saily.tpx.lv/hggJrOGm>
 - Airalo: <https://airalo.tpx.lv/9gfzbvfO>
 - GigSky: <https://gigsky.tpx.lv/JXqebSoo>
- ☐ Portable power bank (charged before embarkation)
- ☐ Universal travel adapter (essential for international cruises)
- ☐ Laptop or tablet + charger (if working or streaming)
- ☐ E-reader or Kindle (long sea days = great reading time)
- ☐ Camera + memory cards + battery charger
- ☐ Underwater camera or GoPro (for snorkeling, beach days): <https://sojournica.com/go/scuba>

- ☐ Headphones or earbuds
 - ☐ Plug converter/multi-plug (cruise cabins have limited outlets, bring a non-surge power strip)
 - ☐ Waterproof phone case or pouch
 - ☐ Earbuds for flights and lounges
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ONBOARD ESSENTIALS

- ☐ Insulated water bottle (ship water is fine to drink; refill for free)
 - ☐ Day bag or small backpack for port excursions
 - ☐ Lanyard for cruise card (keeps it accessible all day)
 - ☐ Magnetic hooks (cruise cabin walls are magnetic, doubles your storage)
 - ☐ Over-the-door shoe organizer (maximize tiny cabin bathroom space)
 - ☐ Reusable tote bag for port shopping
 - ☐ Small padlock for lockers (some excursions have storage)
 - ☐ Pen (for immigration forms and daily activity sheets)
 - ☐ Highlighter (for marking the daily schedule of events)
 - ☐ Books, games, or cards for sea days
 - ☐ Travel umbrella (compact, fits in your day bag)
 - ☐ Snorkeling gear (optional, renting at port is convenient but pricier): <https://sojournica.com/go/scuba>
 - ☐ Laundry bags (to separate worn clothes from clean)
 - ☐ Wrinkle-release spray (for formal night outfits straight from the suitcase)
 - ☐ Nightlight (cruise cabins are very dark, helpful for night-time navigation)
 - ☐ Earplugs and sleep mask (especially in shared or interior cabins)
 - ☐ Ziploc bags in assorted sizes (waterproof organization on beach days)
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PORT DAY ESSENTIALS (Pack in Your Day Bag)

- ☐ Cruise card + photo ID
- ☐ Some local cash + a credit card
- ☐ Travel insurance details + emergency number
- ☐ Phone (fully charged) with offline maps downloaded
- ☐ Water bottle
- ☐ Sunscreen (reapply!)
- ☐ Sunglasses
- ☐ Hat or cap

- ☐ Comfortable walking shoes
 - ☐ Light snack
 - ☐ Rain poncho
 - ☐ Return ship time written down (don't miss departure!)
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LUGGAGE CHECKLIST

- ☐ Main suitcase, packed and within weight limits
 - ☐ Carry-on bag, essentials for embarkation day (swimsuit, change of clothes, documents, medications, valuables)
 - ☐ Day bag / backpack, for port excursions
 - ☐ Luggage tags attached (cruise line provided or your own)
 - ☐ Luggage scale (to avoid airline overweight fees)
 - ☐ TSA-approved locks on checked bags
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FINAL CHECK (Day Before Departure)

- ☐ Travel insurance confirmed and policy saved (cruise coverage: <https://sojournica.com/go/cruise-insurance>)
 - ☐ Passport and documents in your carry-on, not checked luggage
 - ☐ Phone charged and eSIM active:
 - Saily: <https://saily.tpx.lv/hggJrOGm>
 - Airalo: <https://airalo.tpx.lv/9gfzbvfO>
 - GigSky: <https://gigsky.tpx.lv/JXqebSoo>
 - ☐ Power bank charged
 - ☐ Medications in carry-on
 - ☐ Notified someone at home of your itinerary and contact details
 - ☐ Set out-of-office messages and paused any subscriptions if needed
 - ☐ Home secured (locks, timers, mail held)
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ONBOARD TIPS & INSIDER SECRETS

These are the things cruise lines don't advertise. These tips will save you hundreds and make your experience infinitely better.

THE CROWD STRATEGY

When to do things to avoid crowds:

- **Breakfast Buffet:** Packed 7–9am. Go 11am–2pm instead (practically empty).
- **Lunch Buffet:** Slammed noon–1:30pm. Try 10:30am or 2pm.
- **Dinner:** Two seatings (traditional ships) or flexible dining (newer ships). First seating (5–6pm) less crowded than second (8–9pm).
- **Main Pool:** Busiest 10am–3pm. Quietest 7am–9am or after 5pm.
- **Gym:** Least crowded 6–7am or after 9pm.
- **Elevators:** Worst 6pm–8pm (everyone heading to dinner). Use stairs when possible.
- **Deck Space:** Most crowded ports of call days. Quietest sea days.

Insider tip: If you're an early riser, you'll have the entire ship to yourself 6–8am. Best time to do yoga, swim, meditate, or just enjoy peace and quiet.

THE CABIN HACK

Your cabin steward can be your best friend or someone you never see. Make it the first option.

- **Leave a tip on Day 1.** \$5–\$10 is enough. This person cleans your cabin twice daily.
- **They'll remember you.** Better cleaning, faster service, special attention.
- **They go above and beyond.** Need extra towels? They'll leave them. Need to charge your phone in the bathroom? They'll find a way.
- **Tip daily or at the end.** \$5/day is standard. At the end: \$50 for a week is generous.
- **Use their name.** Get it from your welcome packet. "Hi [Name], thank you so much for taking care of our cabin."

Insider tip: Your cabin steward has access to everything and knows all the ship secrets. They're your best resource for tips, restaurant reservations, and problem-solving.

THE DINING STRATEGY

When to eat where, and how to actually get a table.

- **Main Dining Room:** Free but crowded (especially formal nights). Go at off-peak times (4:30pm first seating, 6:45pm second seating).
- **Specialty Restaurants:** \$30–\$70 per person but worth it. Go on SEA DAYS when they're calm and beautiful. Formal night (port days) they're crowded.

- **Buffet:** Best for casual days. Worst on formal nights (locals go to main dining room, buffet is for families with kids).
- **Room Service:** 24-hour, included. Great for late-night snacks, early breakfast, or avoiding dining room crowds.
- **Pre-book specialty dining:** Do this at booking or within first month of sale.
- **Walk-up availability:** Show up 15 minutes before service time. Cancellations happen, tables open up.

Insider tip: Eat an early dinner (4:30–5:30pm first seating) and you'll have the entire ship to yourself 6–8pm for shows, dancing, or exploring.

THE INTERNET/CONNECTIVITY STRATEGY

Don't overpay for Wi-Fi you don't need.

- **Skip Wi-Fi packages:** You're at sea. Use ship Wi-Fi only for email/messaging (free basics). Internet is slow anyway.
- **Use port Wi-Fi:** Most cafes, restaurants, hotels offer free Wi-Fi. Download offline maps before you leave the ship.
- **Get an eSIM:** This is the game-changer. Activate before departure, you have data at every port.
 - Saily: <https://saily.tpx.lv/hggJrOGm> (\$20–\$50 depending on destination)
 - Airalo: <https://airalo.tpx.lv/9gfzbvfO> (similar pricing)
 - GigSky: <https://gigsky.tpx.lv/JXqebSoo> (alternative option)
- **Only buy Wi-Fi if:** You're working on the cruise (not recommended, but sometimes necessary) or you NEED connectivity at sea.

Insider tip: Activate eSIM the day before departure. Test it works on your phone. You'll have data everywhere except the ship (where you don't need it).

THE ALCOHOL/BEVERAGE STRATEGY

Most lucrative area for cruise lines. Here's how to navigate it.

- **Drink packages sound good but:** Average cruise passenger drinks 1–2 drinks/day. Package is \$50–\$80/day. Often not worth it.
- **Calculate it:** 2 drinks/day × 10 nights = 20 drinks. At \$12–\$15/drink = \$240–\$300. Package is \$500–\$800. You'd need 4+ drinks/day.
- **BYOB policy:** Check your cruise line. Most allow wine/beer in cabins (not in public areas).
- **Wine at ports:** Buy wine at ports, bring back to cabin. Infinitely cheaper than onboard prices.
- **Happy hours:** Most ships have 5–6pm happy hours with \$3–\$5 cocktails. Go then.

- **Specialty bars:** Some are free (iced tea, coffee bars). Avoid paid specialty cocktail bars if on a budget.
- **Water is free:** Tap water, ice water, coffee, tea = all included. Stay hydrated.

Insider tip: Set a daily drink budget (\$20–\$40/day) and stick to it. More responsible, less morning regrets.

THE ACTIVITY SELECTION

The daily activity list has 30+ options. You can't do them all. Don't try.

- **Pick 3–4 things maximum.** Spread across the week. You're not on a schedule.
- **You're paying for the ship, not the activities.** Relax. Sleep late. Read. Sit by the pool. That's the real luxury.
- **Skip the mandatory/silly stuff:** Trivia contests, midnight pool parties, karaoke (unless you're into it).
- **Do what YOU enjoy:** Fitness classes, art talks, cooking demos, wine tastings, pick based on your interests.
- **Port days:** Don't over-schedule onboard. You're exploring a new place. That's the activity.
- **Sea days:** Actually relax. Don't feel compelled to attend every show/activity. That's why you came.

Insider tip: The best activities are the ones you discover yourself. Wander the ship. Find the quiet deck. Befriend locals at ports. That's the real cruise experience.

THE TENDER LINE STRATEGY

Some ports require "tenders" (small boats to get ashore). Tenders have lines. Long lines.

- **Go early:** First tender of the day (usually 8–9am) = short line, entire day at port.
- **Or go late:** 2–4pm = most people back on ship, tenders nearly empty, fewer hours ashore but no wait.
- **Avoid mid-morning:** 10am–1pm = everyone trying to get ashore at once. Massive lines.
- **Ask crew:** They'll tell you which tender time has shortest wait.
- **Bring your tender ticket:** It's your boarding pass to get off ship. Lose it, you pay for a replacement.

Insider tip: Early tender means you get the best port time, less crowded attractions, and lunch at popular restaurants. Worth waking up early for.

THE EMBARKATION DAY HACK

Embarkation day can be chaos or smooth. Here's how to make it smooth.

- **Early arrival:** Show up 1–2 hours before your scheduled time. Less crowded.

- **Late arrival:** If you arrive at peak time (2–4pm), grab lunch at port and board later. Lines move faster after 5pm.
- **Have documents ready:** Passport, booking confirmation, ID. Speed up check-in.
- **Check in online:** 24 hours before embarkation. Cuts down wait time significantly.
- **Cabin likely won't be ready:** For embarkation before 4pm, cabins usually ready 4–5pm. Store luggage with bellhop, enjoy the ship.
- **Don't stress:** Everyone's disoriented on embarkation day. It's normal. By evening, you'll feel comfortable on the ship.

Insider tip: Embarkation day = rough day. Day 2 = happy day. Get through day 1, then relax from day 2 onward.

THE SEASICKNESS PREVENTION

15–30% of cruisers get seasick. It's preventable.

- **Cabin location matters:** Middle of ship (midship) = most stable. Front/back = more motion.
- **Lower decks better than upper:** Physics. Less swaying.
- **Request mid-ship, lower deck cabin** when booking.
- **Motion sickness remedies (buy before boarding):**
 - Sea-Bands (acupressure wristbands, \$12)
 - Dramamine (over-the-counter, \$5–\$8)
 - Ginger chews (natural, \$8)
 - Scopolamine patches (prescription, most effective but requires doctor)
- **When to take it:** 30 minutes before you board (for sea bands/patches), then follow instructions.
- **Avoid alcohol:** Alcohol + sea = instant nausea.
- **Fix your eyes on horizon:** Look at the horizon, not the waves. Tricks your brain.
- **Eat lightly:** Don't overeat. Small frequent meals, ginger tea.
- **Dramamine side effect:** Makes you sleepy. Take it at night if possible.

Insider tip: Prevention is everything. Take motion sickness remedy the day you board (even if you feel fine). It's cheap insurance against ruining your cruise.

THE MONEY MANAGEMENT

Easiest way to overspend: Not tracking spending. Hardest way to enjoy cruise: Constant money stress.

- **Set a daily budget:** Decide before you board how much/day you'll spend onboard.

- **Tell your cabin steward:** Sounds weird but works. They'll help you track it.
- **Review your account daily:** Check your onboard bill daily. Catch unauthorized charges immediately.
- **Cash envelope system:** Withdraw port spending cash in advance, use only what you brought.
- **Put gratuities on account:** You'll pay it all at once at the end, not nickel-and-diming yourself.
- **Don't enter casinos unless:** You're okay losing that money. Casinos are designed to take money from you.
- **Photo packages:** Beautiful but expensive. Take your own photos on your phone instead.
- **Final bill:** Review carefully. Dispute any charges you don't recognize immediately.

Insider tip: The single best way to enjoy a cruise is to not worry about money. Budget generously at the start, then spend freely onboard. Peace of mind is worth it.

THE SOLO TRAVEL STRATEGY

Solo cruising is amazing. Here's how to do it right.

- **Sit at assigned dining table** (don't request alone). You'll meet other travelers.
- **Introduce yourself:** At dinner on day 1, introduce yourself. Many solo travelers will gravitate to your table.
- **Attend group activities:** Trivia, wine tastings, meet-and-greets. Built-in social opportunities.
- **Travel insurance includes emergency solo travel:** If you get sick, solo travel insurance covers repatriation. Get it.
- **Safety tips:**
 - Tell someone at home your itinerary
 - Share location with a trusted friend
 - Don't accept drinks from strangers
 - Avoid sketchy areas alone in ports
 - Trust your gut
- **Explore ports with groups:** Most excursions have other solo travelers. Book group tours.
- **Cabin:** Interior cabin (cheapest) is fine if you're not spending much time there.

Insider tip: Solo cruisers often become friends. By day 2, you'll have a group. Cruising solo is actually amazing because you can do whatever YOU want without compromising.

THE FAMILY CRUISE STRATEGY

Cabins are tight, tempers get short, kids get bored. Here's how to prevent chaos.

- **Set expectations:** Talk with family before cruise about activities, budget, schedule.

- **Book connecting cabins:** If budget allows. Everyone gets privacy, you can lock the connecting door.
- **Kids clubs:** Use them. They're free, monitored, and give adults alone time.
- **Alone time for adults:** Hire babysitter at kids club, go have dinner together. 2 hours of couple time prevents resentment.
- **Give kids freedom:** Let them (safely) explore the ship. Empowers them, exhausts them (good for sleep).
- **Have a plan for formal nights:** Do formal nights fun (kids dress up fancy, take photos). Don't force it if they hate it.
- **Budget for activities:** Kids want to do stuff. Allocate funds for paid activities, mini golf, climbing wall, etc.
- **Sea days are your friend:** No port ports = full day on ship = everyone relaxes together.
- **Manage expectations:** Cruise is fun but not magic. Some moments won't be perfect. That's okay.

Insider tip: The best family cruises aren't the ones with the most activities. They're the ones where family just enjoys being together without the usual home distractions.



BONUS RESOURCES & PARTNER RECOMMENDATIONS

These are tools, platforms, and services I actually use. Full transparency: some are affiliate links, meaning if you book through them, I earn a small commission. But I only recommend things I'd use myself.

FOR FLIGHTS & HOTELS

- **Booking.com**, Best for bundling flights + pre/post cruise hotels at discounted rates
 - Link: <https://booking.tpx.lv/3RY8svA4>
 - **Expedia**, Compare across multiple airlines and hotels in one place
 - Link: <https://expedia.tpx.lv/LYPNNyTH>
 - **Google Flights**, Best price comparison (even if you don't book there)
 - **CheapOair**, Discounted airfare and travel packages
 - Link: <https://cheapoair.tpx.lv/SVTZx284>
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FOR SHORE EXCURSIONS

Book through these, not the ship, and save 20–40%

- **Viator**, 20–40% cheaper than booking through the ship, excellent reviews

- Link: <https://viator.tpx.lv/UoBskuR1>
 - **GetYourGuide**, Excellent for European ports and diverse activities
 - Link: <https://getyourguide.tpx.lv/q95gg58E>
 - **Klook**, Excellent for Asia and Pacific cruise destinations, local guides
 - Link: <https://klook.tpx.lv/ZA5ANdmr>
 - **GoWithGuide**, For truly unique, local experiences (avoid generic group tours)
 - Link: <https://sojournica.com/go/tour-guide>
-

FOR TRAVEL INSURANCE (CRUISE-SPECIFIC)

- **Seven Corners**, Medical, evacuation, cancel-for-any-reason coverage built specifically for cruises
 - **Link:** <https://sojournica.com/go/cruise-insurance>
 - **Why it matters:** One medical evacuation at sea costs \$50,000+. Insurance is \$100–\$200. Do the math.
 - **When to buy:** Within 2 weeks of cruise booking (unlocks cancel-for-any-reason coverage)
-

FOR INTERNATIONAL DATA (eSIM)

- **Saily**, Activates in the app, works at every port, pay as you go
 - Link: <https://saily.tpx.lv/hggJrOGm>
 - Cost: \$20–\$50 depending on destination
 - **Airalo**, Similar coverage and reliability, slightly different pricing
 - Link: <https://airalo.tpx.lv/9gfzbvfO>
 - **GigSky**, Alternative eSIM option with global coverage
 - Link: <https://gigsky.tpx.lv/JXqebSoo>
 - **Why:** Avoid \$10–\$15/MB roaming charges. eSIM gives you unlimited data at every port.
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FOR SCUBA & UNDERWATER GEAR

- **Scuba Equipment & Underwater Gear**, Browse, compare, and purchase quality gear before your cruise
 - Link: <https://sojournica.com/go/scuba>
 - **Why it matters:** Bring your own gear you trust, or rent quality equipment at ports with confidence.
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FOR CRUISE REVIEWS & PLANNING

- **CruiseMapper**, Detailed ship reviews, itinerary information, port reviews
 - **Cruise Critic**, Community forums with real traveler experiences, ship reviews, tips
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FOR FINDING DEALS & DISCOUNTS

- **Cruise Direct**, Compare prices across all cruise lines
 - Link: <https://sojournica.com/go/cruise>
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HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

Don't try to do everything at once. Use it like this:

1. **Now (Immediately):** Save or print this document. Bookmark it.
2. **When you book a cruise:** Jump to the timeline that matches your cruise date. Use that section to know what to do and when.
3. **2 weeks before departure:** Fill out the Budget Planner worksheet. See your true cost.
4. **1 week before:** Use the Packing Checklist to pack systematically.
5. **Day before:** Use the Final Check section. Make sure nothing is forgotten.
6. **Onboard:** Reference the Onboard Tips section whenever something feels confusing or overwhelming.

That's it. Follow this, and your cruise will be calm, organized, and absolutely amazing.



FINAL THOUGHTS

You've got this. You've prepared. You know what to do and when to do it. You'll pack smart, budget smart, and experience a cruise like you've done it ten times.

But most importantly, you'll actually *relax* on your cruise instead of spending the whole time worried or stressed.

That's the whole point of taking a cruise in the first place.

Safe travels and smooth seas.

For more cruise travel guides, destination inspiration, and travel insurance tips, visit [Sojournica.com/cruise-travel](https://sojournica.com/cruise-travel)

