

# How to Get the Best Cruise Deal

Tips To  
Save Big  
\$\$\$\$\$ On  
Cruise  
Vacations

By Sid Kaplan



## Getting The Best Cruise Deal

The intent of this report is to provide valuable information on how to get the absolute best pricing when shopping for a cruise. What follows are many strategies and tips to prepare you for your discussion with your cruise travel agent or even if you are talking directly to the cruise line.

Here are some points **you need to be aware of** from an investment point of view.

- The **Season** you choose to travel will affect the cost of your cruise. The cabin you choose will cost more “in season” than it will “off-season”. You want to consider that in making your investment. Is the money you save by being flexible worth the trade off in timing for you? If you are looking for seasonal savings consider the following to be **off season or at least shoulder season** (just prior to high season):

**Caribbean** – September to just prior to Christmas sailings, first two weeks in January (excluding New Year cruises)

**Alaska** – May and September and occasionally some October sailings

**Europe** – April, May, September and October

**Bermuda** – May and September

**Canada / New England** – no real price break due to limited sailings

**South America or South Pacific** - varies by cruise line and demand.

Keep in mind that there are year round cruises in the Caribbean but hurricane season is generally from June to November so you could miss some ports of call or be diverted to others should the weather turn unfavorable. Pricing during this period should be to your advantage

The “best” savings due to season will be during the fall, because September through just prior to Christmas sailings are essentially a “slow” period for the cruise lines. Keep in mind that this does not include Thanksgiving week, which will be priced at a premium.

Christmas, New Year’s, Easter, Spring Break, and national holidays where kids are out of school, teachers have breaks, or summer holidays at drive to ports are prime times for the cruise lines. Even booking a year out may not result in much of a saving at holiday time, but at least you will get on board!!

Times of “**International Crisis**” may depress demand for cruising and travel in general. If you have the courage to keep traveling, as many have without incident, you will discover that cruise lines are offering remarkable deals to keep their ships full.



**NOTE:**

Most cruise lines make the majority of their profits from what is called “on board revenue”. This is the money you spend while on the ship for optional extras. Examples are alcohol and non-included beverages, gifts, shore excursions and of course in the casinos. The actual price of your cruise when the market is depressed for international tension hardly covers the hard costs of promotion, advertising, sales and marketing etc.

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Before you start shopping, please understand what the components of cruise pricing are. Some are discountable by the cruise line, some are not.

**CRUISE FARE** – the actual fare charged by the cruise line for passage on the ship. The cruise line has full flexibility with this fare and discounts are usually from this component of your cruise cost.

**PORT CHARGES, DEPARTURE TAX, CUSTOMS FEES, IMMIGRATION FEE and OTHER GOVERNMENT FEES** – charges levied on the cruise line for a particular sailing that are non-discountable.

**AIR FARE OR OTHER TRANSPORTATION COSTS** – costs of getting you to the port of embarkation and disembarkation. Not usually discounted but often subsidized.

## **TRUTH IN ADVERTISING**

Be **very cautious** when reading advertising that states the price starting with the word “from”. Generally, this refers to the lowest available, least desirable cabin category (may mean upper and lower bunk beds) and may mean very specific dates and very specific cabins. So the “From \$299” may excite you but as we said earlier “there is no free lunch”. It is not how much you save – but what you get for what you pay!

- **Brochure Rates** – rates printed in cruise line brochures are rarely applicable. Do not be discouraged by what you see in these glossy, highly sensual marketing pieces. The important fact is the rates in the brochures

are inflated and are in the same vein as “manufacturer’s suggested selling price” for automobiles.

The rate in the brochure allows the cruise line to dramatically lower the price to you by way of announcing a discount of 40/50/60 or even 70% so you assume you are getting the deal of your life. Baloney – EXCEPT – when you are traveling at the cruise lines peak periods such as Christmas, New Year’s or Spring Break but even then you will find Early Booking Discounts (by a variety of names) may be applicable to the brochure rate.

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**NOTE:**



It does happen from time to time that you will pay a premium close to or at the brochure rate. If the sailing you are interested in is close to capacity, the cruise line will raise the fares to increase their yield! I once paid a high brochure rate because I absolutely wanted to go on the New Year’ sailing. Had I waited until January 7, I could take the same ship and same itinerary for **45% less!!!**

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You will often see promotions labeled as “**2 for 1**” or “**TWO FOR ONE**” suggesting that two of you can go on the same cruise for the fare that one person would pay. Most often that “2 for 1” refers to the Brochure Rate, meaning you take the Brochure Rate, divide it in half and that is what each of you pay. (That does not include air, taxes or port charges).

The reality is, unless you have picked a high season or high demand sailing there are fares available to you that will be much lower. These will be explained later. Our point here is, challenge the fare by doing your homework. And, as my father always taught me, there is no such thing as a “free lunch”!

- **EARLY BOOKING DISCOUNTS** – every cruise line establishes a discounted fare structure in their brochure. You will see the “brochure rate” followed by some equivalent to an early booking incentive.

**Princess Cruise Lines** calls their early booking discount - Escape Fares©

**Carnival Cruise Lines** names their early booking discount – Super Saver© rate.

**Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines** calls their EBC – Breakthrough© and Ynot©

**Holland America Line** calls it ES or Early Savers

*These EBD's may have restrictions as to limited time offer and “book before dates”. It is reasonable to conclude that this rate is the minimum discount you should expect for your cruise if you meet the terms and conditions outlined in the brochure.*

- **AGENCY GROUP SPECIALS**

Travel agencies are often given incentives by the cruise line to block significant amounts of space well in advance of the sailing dates. The incentives may be in the form of added amenities, better pricing or both. Consortium and National Accounts of the cruise line will have very good opportunities for you to save significant money.

The following table shows the significant price saving a client can enjoy by taking advantage of this particular agency's group promotion. Always ask your booking agent what groups the agency has available.

They may not be exactly on the travel dates you want but the savings for moving your plans by a week or two can be significant. It should be obvious by now but I will point out that the table is shown by category of cabin!

Notice the saving between a full ocean view cabin and an obstructed ocean view cabin.

**7 Nights - Sunday, September 14, 2009  
Eastern Caribbean aboard the XYZ of the SEAS**

Category	Brochure Price	<b>ABC Agency Price</b>	Client Savings
AC - Ocean view mini-suite with private balcony	\$3836	<b>\$1380</b>	\$2456
BB - Ocean view stateroom with private balcony	\$3130	<b>\$1226</b>	\$1904
DD - Ocean view stateroom	\$2839	<b>\$1165</b>	\$1674
FF - Obstructed view stateroom	\$2639	<b>\$1073</b>	\$1566
II - Inside stateroom	\$2240	<b>\$981</b>	\$1259
JJ - Inside stateroom	\$2117	<b>\$919</b>	\$1198

You may see some “**added value**” by a particular agency with group space on a sailing. This “added value” may take the form of additional amenities such as:

***“Value - 1 bottle of wine and 5x7 photo vouchers included for the first and second passengers.” Or “US\$100 per person on board credit for the first and second passengers in the cabin.”***

- **REPEAT PASSENGER SAVINGS PROGRAMS**

The majority of cruise lines jealously guard and covet the loyalty of their past passengers. Each cruise line offers incentives for their past passengers (often referred to as Alumni) to remain with the cruise line and continue cruising on their ships. Some examples are:

Princess Cruise Lines - Captain's Circle Club  
Holland America - Mariner Club  
Norwegian Cruise Line – Latitude Club  
Crystal Cruises – Crystal Society  
Yachts of Seabourn – Seabourn Club  
Regent Seven Seas Cruises – Seven Seas Society  
Royal Caribbean Cruise Line – Crown and Anchor Society  
Celebrity Cruises – Captain's Club  
Cunard Line – Cunard World Club

Past passenger or Alumni savings can mean significant discounts if you have sailed with that cruise line before.

Always ask if there are past passenger fares available on the sailing you are interested in (assuming you are a past passenger).

If you are not a past passenger, consider traveling with friends that have sailed on that cruise line before. Most cruise lines will “share the wealth” by allowing a past passenger to book friends and family who have not cruised the line before, a past passenger fare as well. This may be limited to one or two extra cabins at a maximum but well worth investigating. On

some sailings past passengers may receive discounts of more than \$1,000 per person!

Of special note here is **CARNIVAL CRUISE LINES**. Carnival Corporation owns not only Carnival Cruise Line but Holland America, Seabourn, Cunard, Windstar, Costa and most recently Princess Cruise Lines. They offer the VIP or **Vacation Interchange Privileges™** program. If you sail on any of their **World's Leading Cruise Lines™** you will be entitled to the same past-guest savings currently being extended by any of their cruise lines to their past guests.

This means, for example, if you have sailed on a Carnival ship, you are eligible for past passenger savings on Princess, Costa or perhaps a Holland America cruise if you choose.

- **REGIONAL SPECIALS**

From time to time, cruise lines will offer regional specials based upon geographic areas. You may find an offer which is restricted as follow:

If you can prove residency in an area where the special is being offered, you may end up with significant savings. At times when a cruise line is faced with a yield challenge on their ships they may look for an area or area where they have not yet sold much space and then discount the space in that area to gain the extra business. They usually will not open the the special to everyone because in certain areas they may have done well and frankly don't want the hassle of clients looking for price changes! The point here is that often-regional specials may save you more than past passenger programs and agency group booking discounts. Ask your booking agent for the "best available fares" for the category you are

looking for. Be flexible – if there is a regional promotion the week prior or subsequent to the week you want to go – change your plan and pocket the savings.

- **SENIORS DISCOUNTS**

Yes it does pay to get older! Most cruise lines offer additional discounts (starting about 5% and going much higher) for passengers age 55 and over. Ask your booking agent if the particular sailing you are on has a Senior's Promotion. Compare this price to any groups, regional specials and/or past passenger specials to come up with your lowest rate.

- **CATEGORY "GUARANTEES"**

If you are willing to gamble a bit you can possibly be upgraded to a higher category by booking into what is called a "category guarantee". The difference is that with a "normal" reservation you will receive an "assigned" stateroom and you will know the exact number a location of the stateroom, however under a "category guarantee" you leave it to the cruiseline to assign you a cabin just prior to sailing (anywhere from one week to three days prior). The advantage is you will receive at a **minimum**, the category you are paying for but you stand a good chance of being upgraded to a better category for no extra charge. Sometimes and depending on the ship's yield, this upgrade may be several categories.

The only downside is if you want to avoid the bow or aft (very front or very back) you may be assigned there so it might not be worth the gamble to you.

There are several types of “category guarantees” to be aware of.

**ROS** – (Run of Ship). This is generally the lowest fare you can get on the ship. You will not know what type of cabin or where it is located usually until the week of sailing. But you will get the lowest rate available and could end up with good upgrades. The cabin could be an inside or an outside.

**INSIDE ROS** - Same as above only you have restricted it to Inside Cabins only and you will get the lowest available rate for an inside cabin with potential for upgrades. (Sometimes referred to as category “Z” guarantee).

**OUTSIDE ROS** - Same as above only you have restricted it to Outside Cabins only and you will get the lowest available rate for an outside or ocean view cabin with potential for upgrades. (Sometimes referred to as category “Y” guarantee).

**SPECIFIC CATEGORY GUARANTEE** - As discussed in the accommodation section, ship cabins are laid out on decks and are given category numbers or letters. You can select a specific category to guarantee and will receive the lowest rate for that category – you will get at least the category you guarantee but leave the cruise line the option to upgrade you without charge. For example, on Holland America, a category H stateroom is the minimum view cabin.

If you select category H, you will receive at least an ocean view cabin, but may receive upgrades to more expensive categories without any upgrade charge. You won't know your cabin up front but if this doesn't cause you anxiety, it may be worth it to try for the upgrade. Talk to your booking agent about how full a particular sailing is and look carefully at the deck plans.

Some categories have very few cabins and if you can book a guarantee you will likely get an upgrade without having to pay more money.



**A NOTE ABOUT UPGRADES:** An upgrade is basically moving you from a lower category to a higher category without charging you for the upgrade. Essentially you are getting a higher priced (not necessarily different layout) cabin than you paid for.

Some cruise lines (notably Princess) ask your booking agent at the time of booking whether you would be will to receive an upgrade if one becomes available. Not a stupid question. If you are adamant that you want a specific cabin on a ship, ensure you tell your booking agent “no upgrades”.

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You generally have the right to approve the upgrade before they move you. Under many “past passenger” programs, an upgrade may be extended to thank you for your loyalty. This is not automatic but upgrades are generally extended to past passengers before “first time” passengers.

### **THIRD & FOURTH PASSENGERS IN A CABIN**

If you don't mind sharing your cabin with a third or fourth person, you can achieve significant cruise discounts for these passengers.

This is ideally suited for families, say, Mom and Dad, junior and his sister. Remember that the space available is generally the same as a double occupancy cabin and so may be constrained - but it is often better than paying the same double occupancy rate for another cabin.

You will receive one rate per person for the first two passengers in the cabin and then a discounted rate for the third and/or fourth passenger in the cabin. The discount will be on the cruise fare only. Port charges, taxes and air fare will not normally be discounted. In addition, if the third and fourth guests are children there may be a "kid's rate" available. Generally, children under two will be free but you may have to pay port charges and taxes.

### **MILITARY SERVICE**

If you are currently in the military or have previous military service, many cruise lines are prepared to offer you a discount. When you are talking to your travel agent ask them to check if your service qualifies you for a reduced fare.

### **BOOKING ON BOARD**

Once you are on board you may want to consider booking your next cruise with an on board cruise line representatives.

Cruise lines recognize the best time to sell you another cruise is while you are enjoying a present cruise. Often they will make available attractive offerings, cruise discounts or incentives for you, such as reduced deposit requirements, additional amenities or shipboard credits. The deposit is fully refundable and you will have locked in the incentives.

Some cruise lines will allow you to leave the ship and destination open and you can discuss alternatives with your booking agent once you return home.

The cruise line will advise the booking agent of your reservation and your agent will oversee the entire booking until the time of sailing. Your agent will also confirm to you whether the offer is indeed the best or whether there are other options you may wish to consider.

### **BACK TO BACK CRUISES**

Many cruise lines offer alternating cruise between the Eastern and Western Caribbean, and you can stay on the ship extending your 7 or 10 day vacation to 14 or 20 days, visiting many different ports. Often there will be an incentive or cruise discount to do the back to back. It may not be much (anywhere from \$100 to 10%) but it is a way to extend your vacation for less.

### **REPOSITIONING CRUISES**

Cruise lines move their ships from and to different markets at specific times of the year or when a new ship enters the market and needs to be positioned to its home port. For example, April will see a large number of ships move from the Caribbean to the Alaska market. October will see the reverse. Often these sailings are long, and you may get significant discounts for taking advantage of the repositioning.

New launches may feature a unique itinerary as the ship positions from its port of construction to its port of operation and cruise discounts may apply to this type of sailing. A good booking agent will be aware of these type of opportunities.

## CRUISE FOR FREE

Cruise lines provide travel incentives for booking group travel. One of the incentives is called a "tour conductor", commonly referred to as a TC!

A tour conductor is essentially a credit for the Group Leader or Pied Piper, to cruise for free with a group of friends, relatives, or colleagues that you have brought to the cruise line.

Keep in mind though, the group will have to pay for all port charges, government taxes and fees and airfare to the port of departure if needed.

Cruise lines base their rates on double occupancy that is two persons to a cabin. Often they refer to occupancy as "berths". One berth is one bed, or one passenger.

The group size needed to gain a free berth (bed) on a cruise varies by cruise line and their promotions. A rule of thumb for mass market lines (Carnival, Princess, Royal Caribbean etc) is a minimum of 16 passengers occupying 8 cabins or staterooms (third and fourth passengers in a cabin do not count toward the total). The 16th passenger is awarded TC or **Tour Conductor** status and sails for free. Some lines refer to their TC policy as "1 for 15" which essentially says the same as the 16th in the group is free.

It gets a little more complicated because that 1 for 15 gets you only one berth (bed) in one cabin. Your cabin mate will still have to pay for his/her berth.

By now you are way ahead of me! Yes, get 32 passengers into your group and get a FREE cabin (two berths)! Be careful to be clear on the group policy:

- 16 passengers in the group allows the 16th person to cruise for free.
- 16 **cabins/staterooms** means the 16th cabin is cruise for free!

One last point on free cabins or berths - **many cruise lines offer a free fare for less than 16 people**. For example, ultra-luxury line, The Yachts of Seabourn, offers one free berth for every ten sold. You may also find cruise lines offering even more attractive terms with off season sailings.

Cruise lines are constantly changing their tour conductor programs and you may be able to achieve an even better ratio. You do not have to take the “free” berth or cabin – you can sell it and split the proceeds amongst your group and reduce everyone’s price!

### **Cruise for Free Trading Your Talent for A Free Cabin**

One last comment on getting a good deal, cruise lines are always looking for a way to keep guests entertained and occupied on days at sea. They want Enrichment Speakers or lecturers on any number of subjects and often you can trade your expertise for a free or substantially discounted cruise.

Cruise lines look for dance instructors, arts and crafts, bridge experts (cards not roads), gentlemen hosts, history majors, port lecturers, and computer instructors and so on.

This topic is beyond the scope of this volume, however if this lights your fire, by all means investigate the opportunity.

If you are in a hurry to find out more about speaking on cruise ships, this information comes from Daniel Hall, who has cruised the world as an onboard speaker and is teaching others how to cruise for free. Go here for more information on [Speakers Cruise Free](#).

### **Leverage Your Currency**

Most cruise lines have pricing available in US dollars. Always check your currency exchange rate against the US currency. You may be able to book in US dollars and pay less once the exchange is done. At the time of writing, the US dollar is weak, making payment for a cruise much less for European travelers.

[You can check currency exchange rates here.](#)

### **Credit Card Reward Points**

Many credit card companies offer reward points for purchases and these reward points can be used to purchase cruise vacations. Some agencies like [CruiseShipCenters](#) offer Aeroplan reward points with each cruise booked. These points can be used against future cruises.

### **Take A Chance And Win A Cruise**

The above company also has an entry form on their website that provides the opportunity to win a free cruise in exchange for your subscribing to their email marketing. Does not cost to enter!

So there you have it. Print this document and take it with you when seeing a cruise travel agent and qualify the price you are being quoted. You may be able to achieve a combination of the above discounts and really save big \$\$\$\$! Bon Voyage!

