

# How to plan your best Caribbean cruise

We use a travel agent to book our flights and cruise. It doesn't cost more and we are then covered by the Quebec Office of Consumer Protection in case something happens. We use the internet to find the best price and reserve a hotel room.

\*\*I strongly recommend you leave home the day before the cruise, unless of course you live within driving distance from the port. You do not want to "miss the boat" as you would have to make your own way to the first island the ship will visit, which could be very costly!\*\*\*

## Do your homework first

If you go through the following list ahead of time, then you'll be ready to answer all the questions a travel agent or the cruise line will ask you.

- **Time of year** - narrow down your search to the date(s) you want
- **Length of cruise** - you have a choice of 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11 or longer days
- **Itineraries/islands** - shorter cruises go to Eastern and Western Caribbean, longer ones will go all the way down to the ABC islands
- **Cruise lines/ships** - pick a cruise line to suit your needs, then choose a ship
- **Budget** - you need to figure out your budget for the next step
- **Cabin** - are you looking for an inside, ocean view, balcony, mini-suite or suite

- **Dining** – will you want assigned seating in the dining room or ‘anytime’ dining which means you decide where and when
- **Upgrades** – are you open to upgrades if the cruise line offers it to you
- **Beds** – what bed configuration would you prefer, single beds or queen size bed
- **Travel Insurance** – cruise lines offer travel insurance, which usually is more expensive than when you buy it from your travel agent

## Next on your list

- **Book your cruise** – depending on how far in advance you are ready to book your cruise, you will either have to make a deposit and pay the balance at a later date or pay in full if you are within 45 days before departure. You need to check with each cruise line for their terms on payment and on refundable policy
- **Get travel insurance** – you need to buy it at the same time as your deposit
- **Book your flights** – as mentioned above, leave home the day before embarkation and a return flight after 11:30 – noon
- **Book a hotel** – we search online for the best price/value hotel deals.
- **Hotel tips** – you don’t need a hotel on the beach, you are only there for 1/2 day or even an evening. Look for a hotel that features FREE shuttle from the airport and to the port, has FREE breakfast and doesn’t require a payment in advance.

## Get organized

- **Book shore excursions** – I would strongly suggest you book your shore excursions online before leaving home, it will be a lot cheaper than from the ship. Check reviews and recommendations from other cruisers on Cruise Critics and Trip Advisor and Facebook cruising groups. Then book directly with the tour operator
- **Arrange for sitters** – for children and/or animals if applicable to you. We have 2 dogs and we book the sitter months in advance
- **To and from airport** – arrange for your ride or if you will be driving yourself, where will you park

## Week before departure

- **Shopping** – for clothes/shoes you might need
- **Medicine** – make sure you have enough pills for the length of your cruise
- **Make a list** – of what you will be packing
- **Laundry** – make sure everything you want to bring is ready

## Night before departure

This is what I do:

- **Lay it all out** – make piles on the bed of everything you need to bring
- **Divide** – the piles into carry-on and suitcase

- **Travelling** – hang the clothes you will be travelling with and declutter your purse
- **Pack** – your suitcase and carry-on efficiently, roll most everything

**Now go and enjoy your Caribbean cruise!**

*Lise*