**Cruise Line Comments**

When I am talking to people about travel, a frequent question is “What do you think about cruises?” This article is mostly about Ocean cruises. There are also cruises that are on Rivers and other inland waterways. Some people are avid cruisers; others just are interested in what the experience is like. The basics are the same: you leave from a port; there are some number of days; there are ports to visit (some docked and some tendered); dinner meals are pretty good; there is evening entertainment in a show room; you return to a port. For many 7-day cruises, that is right back where you started from. There are lots of people in a small space and lots of walking around. The ship can rock around if the seas are high. Playing table tennis has its own challenges as the floor moves. The main activity onboard ship other than eating and sleeping seems to be alcohol consumption; other possibilities are the casino (air pollution), and some form of water activity (pools, hot tubs, slides, spa, etc.)

There are three general classes of ship: 1. Large and cheap, over 1000 guests. 2. Medium, from 200 to 1000 guests, 3. Expedition and expensive, less than 200 guests. Since I am relatively cheap and just go on cruises to visit the various ports, I have some experience with the large category. I am going to restrict this category even further by evaluating cruise lines where ENGLISH is the primary language on board. For a general comparison on price, I will also show what the usual cost per person is for a 7-day cruise with the listed price (derived from the ***Vacations To Go*** website) plus an additional $200 for including port fees, taxes, and service charges (tips). Shore excursions are generally extra cost unless included as a part of a special deal. Please note that the usual cruise fare is for two people in a cabin; I have selected a balcony for comparison. Much cheaper rates can be achieved in there are 3-4 people in an interior or window cabin, but that is cramped. Suites can cost much more for a given trip.

* Carnival – all for fun, fun for all. Largest cruise line. Appeals to the 20s and 30s crowd. Numerous on-deck activities. Noted for fancy neon décor. I really like the cold soups. Mostly leaves from North American ports. Many cruises from Port of Long Beach, so it is convenient for Los Angeles area residents. Carib $1449, Alaska $1774. Good last-minute deals like Carib $781.
* Princess – owned by Carnival; one step up from Carnival in elegance and dining. Less of a party atmosphere. Appeals to the older generation. Used to be better. World-wide cruise options. Alaska $1516, Australia $1379, Carib $1104, Med $1767. Pricing is quite variable.
* Norwegian – cheap, some entertainment value, they switched my reserved window cabin to a porthole cabin without any compensation. I will not take them again. Generally overpriced balcony, the only cruise around Hawaii. Alaska $1760, Carib $1274, Med $2342, Hawaii $2349
* Royal Caribbean – “of the Seas” has some really huge ships: 5400 passengers. The second largest cruise company. Their newer larger ships have many interesting features. Emphasizes family atmosphere. Alaska $1427, China $1157, Bahamas $1115, Carib $1127, Med $1321
* Celebrity – owned by Royal Caribbean. Attempts to be an upgrade but fails on older ships. Several newer ships are likely better. These ships are in the 2000-3000 passenger class. The Flora and Xpedition (Galapagos) are 100-passenger. Alaska $1868, Carib $1320, Med $2208,
* MSC – stands for Mediterranean Shipping Company. Water is the only free lunch/dinner beverage. Food quality is poor; entertainment quality is good. Many extra-cost restaurants. There are six languages used on the dining menu and for important announcements. Mostly European clientele. Baltic $1542, Carib $1203, Med $1145, Dubai $1095 (Huge 4500 passenger ship)
* Costa – owned by Carnival, but mainly Italian. Five languages used. The Concordia was sunk by crew incompetence. Many Italy based cruises. Disqualified.
* Cunard – also owned by Carnival with a British flair. Huge ships with a stuffed-shirt attitude. Most cruises are longer than 7 days. Still does the USA-Europe routes. Larger ships are better on the rough Atlantic Ocean. Asia $1661, Australia $1981, Europe $2187, Atlantic $2061.
* Disney – like all things Disney: appeals to children, overpriced, charming characters. Many shorter cruises from Florida, combined with Disney World. Alaska $2731, Carib $2219
* Holland America – owned by Carnival. Used to have liberal smoking rules; ships are painted black. Many older ships. Large presence in Alaska. Also disqualified
* P & O Cruises – Australia based. Need more information.

The medium class of cruise ship generally has better meals, larger accommodations, and may include all costs in the up-front price. I am unqualified to judge such cruise lines since they appeal to people who are not me. The price listed is derived from the ***Vacations To Go*** website for a 7-day cruise. All seem to advertise wine with dinner; most are liquor inclusive; service charges and internet included.

* Regent – all suite ships, ultra-all-inclusive; shore excursions included; deluxe shore excursions at extra cost. The Smiths like this luxury line. The three older ships (Alaska $5099) are not as nice as the newer ships: Explorer and Splendor. Baltic $6499
* Silversea – less well-known; advertises personalized service, all-inclusive, ultra-luxury. Nine ships ranging from 100-600 passengers. Alaska $4650, Baltic $5200
* Seabourn – has that really classy feeling; all suites; mostly longer trips. Asia $2499, Baltic $5348
* Crystal – best food service in the business; Dwight’s mom says so. Three ships are 16-30 years old; Alaska $3030, Asia $3049, Carib $2495. The refurbished Crystal Esprit (62 passengers) is a non-smoking vessel. Greece $6629.
* Oceania – uses the old R-class ships from years 2000-2002. Originally an entirely non-smoking fleet. Alcohol extra cost. Alaska $2899, Carib $1299, Med $3099
* Azamara – also uses three R-class ships, owned by Royal Caribbean. Carib $1368, Med $3799

The small class of cruise ship is required to visit many small ports or regulation-controlled areas like Antarctica where the large ships are not allowed to dock. In such cases, the large ships can only cruise on by. This is noted by the word “cruising” on the itinerary. Trips that land on Antarctica can be really expensive with prices that are around $12,000. Boat trips around the Galapagos are also higher priced. I was not happy with Hurtigruten service in Norway or their ship arrangement. The AAA in Southern California refuses to book this cruise line due to complaints. I did like the pricing and service from Grand Circle Travel (not available through a travel agency). They have some ocean-going small ships. The local Calabasas company, AMA Cruises, offers first-class travel experiences for a higher price. The National Geographic trips have the reputation for small groups and maximum cost.

Disclaimer: some evaluations are not based on any experience or facts. None of the information should be considered accurate. Subject to change.