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Cruise successfully on a budget

While cruising is always fun, it can also be costly – but *Daniel Edward* has found nine smart ways to sail in style for less



Not so long ago, a cruise was only for the well to do. Now, cheaper travel costs mean almost anyone can afford an on-board adventure. But it's not just budget-watchers who want a good deal. We all love a bargain, and fortunately there are some really good ways to bag one.

Do your homework before you book, so you know what you'll be spending, and look out for late deals. Always keep your eyes on this magazine, and sign up for our free newsletter at worldofcruising.co.uk, so you'll receive the latest great-value trip details.

Overleaf you'll find nine more top travel tips. See you on board!

Do your homework and you could snap up a brilliant holiday bargain

1 Book an inside cabin

Enjoying a sunset worthy of Turner from your private balcony with a glass of bubbly in hand seems irresistible. But think: it's the same sunset on the promenade deck, and booking an indoor stateroom could mean you can double the number of sunsets on your trip. Interior staterooms are quite similar to ocean-side ones and the bathrooms are identical. If you're tempted by the lower price of an inside cabin, check out Royal Caribbean's Promenade View Staterooms, overlooking the Royal Promenade.



A transatlantic repositioning cruise to Rio could mean lots more fun for less

2 Take a repositioning cruise

Planning a big trip to the Land of the Free? Or even further, to the Land Down Under? Long-haul flights can drain your energy as much as your wallet, and being jetlagged is not the way to explore exciting destinations. Instead, savour the journey as much as the destination with a repositioning cruise. That's how Nadia and Michael, who run the blog coupletraveltheworld.com,

managed 52 nights for less than £30 a night, sailing with Norwegian Cruise Line from San Diego to Rio de Janeiro for the same amount most of us spend on a summer fortnight in the Med.

The most common repositioning cruise is a transatlantic crossing, where the ships sail with fewer guests than regular itineraries, meaning more space for you, a higher crew-to-guest ratio and a bumper offering of shows and activities to keep you entertained. Just remember to factor in the cost of your flight home.

3 Take the cruise less travelled

Ask your friends to list some cruise lines and, chances are, they'll rattle off near-identical lists of the major international brands. As with many things, when it comes to cruising, you pay for the name. There are lines for every budget – Silversea and Regent Seven Seas offer six-star luxury, whereas lines like Marella and Fred Olsen offer more cost-conscious voyages. Striking a balance, Cruise & Maritime Voyages (CMV) operates a fleet of smaller ships from 15 UK and Irish ports, so you'll also be able to save some money by travelling from a port closer to home.

4 Go all-inclusive

It's always good to know how much things will cost before you sail, and all-inclusive packages make it easy to avoid surprises. Of course, every cruise includes the stateroom and at least a couple of dining options, but things can become confusing when it comes to drinks, premium activities and tips. P&O Cruises removed tips from its ships entirely in May 2019. Paul Ludlow, P&O Cruises president, says this makes its cruises 'effortless, where great service comes as standard'.



Book a tour with a local guide as a free alternative to the ship's excursions

5 Support the ship's events

Once you're on board, you can save yourself a bit on your drinks bill by attending popular events organised by the ship's crew. Regular favourites include the Captain's welcome reception, loyalty club presentations and art auctions, where you'll be treated to free drinks. Join in with the daily quizzes, activities and raffles, and you never know what extra goodies could be coming your way. You might even win another cruise.

6 Join free local tours

One of the key reasons to cruise is that you visit a different port every day, and guided tours are a fantastic way to experience the history and culture of a destination. Excursions add enormous depth to your cruise, but booking ship-organised tours can get pricey. So do a quick search online for free walking tours in your ports of call, and join a local guide for a fun and informative overview of their city.



Join a free tour in ports of interest and you'll experience them from a unique angle

7 Book extras in advance

Many cruise lines offer book-before-you-board packages that can include discounts in the spa and deals in the speciality restaurants – which are already far cheaper than you'd pay for the same standard of cuisine on shore. Look out, too, for hefty discounts at the spa if you stay on the ship when everyone else is on a shore excursion. You could have it practically to yourself, too.



Drinks are often best paid for with an all-inclusive package

Make sure you use all your onboard credit. This is free money you can only use on the ship

8 Remember your onboard credit

Whether your travel agent has managed to negotiate you some onboard credit as part of your cruise fare, or the cruise line itself has given you some credit to reward your loyalty, make sure you use all your onboard spending power. This is free money that you can only use on the ship and, as soon as the cruise is over, it's gone. Let the cruise line spoil you with a free spree in the onboard shops, sheer indulgence in the spa or perhaps a photo package for all your cruise memories.

9 Look out for short cruises and half-booked charters

Cruising has joined the mini-break trend, and short cruises offer a perfect option for cash and time-strapped travellers. CMV, Cunard, Fred Olsen, P&O Cruises and Royal Caribbean have dedicated web pages for those looking to dive into holiday mode with limited annual leave. Also, keep an eye out for themed cruises, which are a lot of fun. Fewer people know about these, as the cruise lines don't sell them directly. While they can look expensive in advance, generous last-minute deals are regularly offered to sell the last few tickets. But if you do cave in and book a two-week peak-season Mediterranean favourite, just think how much you're saving by not being at home...