

# Thoughts of One Man

Posts on anything and everything

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## Reasons You're Paying Too Much

### 10 REASONS YOU'RE PAYING TOO MUCH FOR YOUR CRUISE

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Cruise pros and first timers alike can benefit from optimizing their cruise booking routines. Dollars can be saved at every juncture, from planning where and when to go, to accessing special offers three months before you sail. Can't seem to get your cruise fare to go any cheaper? Take advantage of perks and extras, such as onboard credit, that will add value to your vacation in lieu of slashed pricing. Whether in a rush to get something on the books or too rigid to change plans, there are plenty of reasons you might not be getting the best possible cruise vacation for your money. Check out the following 10 ways you might be paying too much for your next cruise.

## 1. Your Schedule Isn't Flexible

If only we could all abracadabra some free time into our lives, coordinating vacation wouldn't be such a problem. The reality is many of us answer to a rigorous work schedule. Add to that a school calendar or any other kind of obligation, and the window becomes even narrower. If you can only cruise around holidays, summer vacation and other peak seasons for cruise travel, you'll pay for the convenience. If you can maneuver even a few days off in the fall or early spring, you can shave hundreds off the price of your sailing. If you know where you want to go, try to plan your trip for the region's shoulder season. Conversely, if you have a limited timeframe for travel, keep an open mind regarding destination. May might be the perfect time to gather the family for the pink sands of Bermuda.

## 2. You Don't Book During a Cruise Sale

The best prices -- or best value -- often show up during promotions offered by the cruise lines or travel agencies. But don't expect the best cruise deals to come to you. You need to be savvy about finding them. When you're ready to book, look to see if you can take advantage of a current promotion. If a promotion is ending soon, either act quickly to take advantage of what's on the table, or gamble with what a cruise line might offer next. If there are no sale fares on offer, consider waiting to book in case new deals are on the horizon. These days, many cruise lines don't wait for wave season, the promotional period between January and March once known for plentiful cruise deals. While that period is still a viable time to book a cruise, promotions swap on a weekly and monthly basis year-round, even offering variations of the same deal (such as choose-your-own-extra deals with a rotation of offers). Holidays -- even observances like Mother's Day -- often warrant an added incentive from cruise lines.



### 3. You Underestimate Travel Agents

In the Age of Information, sometimes we forgo humans with real expertise and let the Internet compute all of our cruise details. As valuable as the Web can be, especially for research, cruise professionals (travel agents) can not only provide you with experience and personalized attention but can lock in a deal that comes laced with comped dinners, free wine and/or copious onboard credit. Established cruise agencies have access to special rates and can help you monitor fares and promotions so you book at the right time for the best price.

### 4. You Don't Book Early

If you can commit to booking a cruise far in advance, your line might offer a discount that's worth overriding your usual vacation-planning procrastination. Unnerving as advance bookings can be, they give you something to look forward to and let you lock in early-booking deals or promotions only available when reserving your next cruise onboard your current one. (You only have to put down a deposit, and you can re-price your trip if fares go down before final payment.) Plus, you have the advantage of being able to request particular cabins or book onboard experiences the moment they become available. Travel insurance can help ease your fears about putting money down so far from your future cruise.

### 5. You Aren't Vigilant About Tracking Cruise Fares

Everyone will guarantee you have the best cruise deal ... that is until a better deal comes along. If you monitor cruise fares after you put down a deposit, you can adjust your cruise rate when prices fall. The magic period lies between booking and final payment, which is normally 60 to 90 days prior to departure. If your cruise fare drops before your final payment is made, there is a good chance you will be able to have the price adjusted in your favor. A travel agent can certainly take the hassle out of this process, but it never hurts to be your own price-drop advocate. Any time before final payment is fair game to peruse other website offers or take advantage of the perks and value-adds of a new promotion from your cruise line. (Though if the fine print stipulates new bookings only, you'd have to cancel your deposited sailing and rebook to benefit.) Checking in once in a while can lead to savings on your next cruise.



## 6. You Don't Budget for Life Onboard

A major mistake in planning your next cruise is not considering what you'll spend once onboard -- or how you can save money during your trip. When on vacation, the spa treatments, exclusive sun deck passes, dinner theater shows, souvenirs and, of course, cocktails come a-calling. Self-control quickly vanishes. To avoid racking up shipboard expenses nearing another cruise fare, don't forget to take advantage of onboard savings like discounts at the spa on port days or sales at the shops toward the end of the cruise. If you're planning on gulping gimlets or the kids imbibe soda by the liter, look into purchasing a beverage package. For lines with many specialty restaurants, an unlimited dining package (multiple meals at a reduced cost) might also be prudent if you look forward to experiencing a new dining venue nearly every night of your sailing. Or simply make an onboard spending budget, and stick to it.

## 7. You Don't BYO

"BYO" doesn't just apply to alcohol. Cruise lines are more lenient than airlines in the sense that for many, you can bring your own cases of water, soda and snacks onboard. Why pay inflated rates for a handful of your favorite candy in the onboard sundries shop when you can stash it in your cabin? This also applies to seasick medication, toiletries, batteries and other items you might need throughout your cruise. They'll be much more expensive on the ship, so bring a stash from home. If you know you enjoy a glass or two of wine in your room before heading to dinner, check your line's alcohol policy (how much wine or liquor, if any, you can bring onboard at no charge). Corkage fees usually apply to open bottles at the bar or at a restaurant, so if you want to avoid them, sip privately.

## 8. You're Not Loyal

It's okay to try different cruise lines, but if you're ever curious how fellow passengers seem to be getting complimentary bottles of Champagne, free laundry services and invites to exclusive cocktail parties, it's because they've done this all before. Loyalty perks can go into effect as soon as your second cruise with the same cruise line, but special amenities vary by line. (Check out individual cruise line loyalty programs.) Pledging your precious time and hard-earned money to one cruise company can result in discounts, upgrades and even a free cruise on lines that include Oceania and Crystal. If you have ample time to sail, maintain multiple loyalty programs by cruising with various lines over time. (Bonus if those lines fall under the same parent company -- Le Club Voyage on Azamara shares some rewards with the Captain's Club on Celebrity Cruises and the Crown & Anchor Society on Royal Caribbean.)



## 9. You Pay Full Fare for the Kids

Just because many cruise lines charge the same for a baby as they would an adult passenger, doesn't mean you have to pay major bucks for your minors to cruise. MSC Cruises allows kids 11 and younger to sail free at all times, and those 12 to 17 can take advantage of reduced fares. Kids also sail free during select booking periods on luxury line Crystal Cruises and river cruise operator CroisiEurope. On other lines, look for promotions that offer reduced or free kids' fares, third/fourth passenger fares or "friends and family." All that means is when two people in a cabin are paying full pop, the third and fourth passengers sharing the same room can take advantage of discounted or free cruise fares. Sailing with a brood or a Girl Scout troop? Many major cruise lines offer group discounts on eight or more cabins booked together. The rewards for organizing such a large outing at sea are money-saving perks like onboard credit or even a free cabin, if you qualify.

## 10. You're Not Smart About Cruising Solo

Cruise lines prefer passengers to book a cabin two by two, so solo travelers are typically charged a single supplement -- a markup that, at times, can reach an additional 100 percent of the cruise fare -- to supplement the "missing" passenger. However, more and more lines are reconsidering the single cruiser, and many -- including Norwegian, Royal Caribbean and Costa -- have purpose-built cabins for solo travelers at supposedly more reasonable rates. Just beware: A solo cabin during peak season might be more than a single supplement on a shoulder season cruise. Plenty of lines offer solo cruise deals that reduce or even waive this fee, but they tend to be river or luxury lines. Don't just book something because it says "solo deal." Do the math to see which option makes the most financial sense. Just be honest about what kind of cruise experience you are looking for, for the price (lounge access for single travelers or gentleman hosts for dancing, for example).