

Cruise News

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Special points of interest:

- > [Highlights of an Alaskan Cruise](#)
- > [Flying First Class](#)
- > [Are ships safe](#)
- > [Cruises on a honeymoon.](#)

Highlights of an Alaskan cruise

For many a cruise to Alaska is a once in a lifetime trip. It is a privilege to have been on two different cruises to Alaska both round trip from Vancouver, but visiting different ports for different lengths of time. One was a one week cruise just within the inside passage and another was two weeks round trip turning around at Whittier, Alaska.

Both cruises represent very different but somewhat similar experiences. The longer cruise was aboard the Sapphire Princess while the shorter cruise was on Serenade of the seas. Both were full of families inclusive of multiple generations.

Alaskan cruises offer the opportunity to see so much scenery, from glaciers to many variety of whales. In fact one can do both along with enjoy some world class fishing all in one day. The wildlife is abundant in Alaska both on land (bears, moose, birds such as the Majestic Bald Eagle) and at sea (whales, huge game fish, and a wide variety of sea lions and otters).

The weather is really nice for most folks to enjoy during the Summer cruise months. Days are often fairly cool with some getting warm for a few hours, but seldom do they see the hot weather like we have in Texas. On beautiful, clear days it is possible to see Denali, the highest point in North America, from Anchorage. Even when raining, it is a nice place to be.

For the active outdoorsmen, there are many opportunities to hike, mountain climb, and/or glacier climb. Camping is fun for many, but requires a bit of special planning due to bear populations around Alaska. Sea based adventure is fun as well. There is fishing, bird watching, kayaking, running the rapids in kayaks or rafts, and much more. Don't forget gold panning is popular in the areas of Southeast Alaska which once beckoned many who wanted to get rich in the Klondike. Believe it or not; all of the above can be accomplished in a week long cruise with a day or two before or after the cruise.

As pets are part of our families planning their care for when the human side of the family heads off on vacation is important. Make it a priority once the vacation plans are set to ensure pet care is addressed.

Inside this issue:

Is cruising safe?	2
When can I get the best cruise fare?	2
What is the best cabin for a cruise?	2
Is first class ari worth the extra cost?	3
What cruise destinations are hot for 2013?	3
Is cruising with big groups a bad idea?	3
Is a cruise a good honeymoon choice?	4

Pets on vacation

Most households have beloved pets. While we love to get away on vacation, we can't always take our pets with us. In the case of international travel it is difficult to take pets along. It is key to plan for pet accommodations while away.

For those with multiple pets the need for pet care can turn expensive. Depending on the pets, species and number of

animals it may be possible for someone to come in and care for the pets, otherwise it may require they be kenneled or stay at someone's home. In either case the costs probably should be considered as the vacation is initially planned. Often, especially when multiple pets are involved, one must book the kennel in advance, sometimes such at peak holiday times, well in advance. This is

important to consider as well. If it is a kennel never before used by the pets, an inspection is probably a good idea. As pets are part of our families planning their care for when the human side of the family heads off on vacation is important. Make it a priority once the vacation plans are set to ensure pet care is addressed.

Is cruising safe?

After the Costa Concordia crash just over a year ago, safety at sea was called into question. During 2012, CLIA came out with a slate of changes that most cruise lines adopted related to enhanced safety measures. Others in the industry have called the changes lipstick on pigs.

Ultimately, comparing cruising, to driving to the cruise, one is much less likely to get hurt or killed while on the cruise itself. The drive and flights to get to or from the cruise along with the shore excursions are more dan-

gerous than the cruise itself. Of course statistics are great until a sensational accident happens such as did with the Concordia.

The press factors in as well, often taking events out of context. Safety at sea is important to all professional mariners. Nobody wants to see a fire or other incident occur on their ship.

Precautions are taken to minimize the risk. Further, cruise lines typically have medical care available on the ships to help deal with personal injuries aboard the ship. Nobody wants to see passengers or crew injured and when they do

occur, crew want to see rapid treatment of the injuries.

What cruisers need to consider is the group of passengers come from all over the world with different cultural values and backgrounds. To that end, one must be aware of their surroundings as they would on land. It is not possible to assume that going to sea makes everything safer than on land. Kids must be especially aware of traps inappropriate adults set for them and steer clear. Parents must offer good guidance with an eye to safety.



Find neat doorways while walking around Old San Juan.

See the Atlantis Island Resort while visiting the Nassau area of the Bahamas. There is plenty for all family members there.

When can I get the best deal on a cruise?

Everyone wants to save money when buying things. This holds true for cruises as well. Like with most things sales occur in some annual cycles although also can occur at any time. Many factors play into the timing of sales.

Generally one of the big annual sale periods comes in the first quarter of the year called "Wave Season" when a large volume of the cruise cabins are booked for the year. Virtually all

cruise lines will have special offers during that time frame.

The specials tend to vary based on season of the cruise along with the popularity of the particular cruise ship and sailings. Bigger deals are often provided on harder to sell cruises.

During the rest of the year, the best bargains are typically found on cruises hard to sell. Some of it is seasonality such as for cruises between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Trans-

oceanic cruises are often good bargains.

Sometimes those who can sail at the last minute will pick up some good deals. The tradeoff though is the cost of getting to the port so often these deals are best for those who live near to the cruise ports. These deals are often announced weekly. (Check our site for these deals.) Ultimately letting your agent know of your desires is key as deals happen year round.

What is the best cabin for my cruise?

Cabin choice on a cruise is a big discussion point for many cruisers. Depending on the value one places on privacy and how much time they plan to spend in their cabin versus the public spaces on the ship are important in determining what cabin is best. There is no general answer because ultimately it's a personal choice for each cruiser.

It is possible that different cruise destinations will yield different cabin choices for the same cruis-

ers. Our own family is one of those where the destination can determine the cabin choice. If we are going to Alaska we will spend far more time in public spaces and can take a bargain cabin regardless of location and view, or lack thereof. When we plan more private time on the cruise we tend to go for a suite for more space and a nicer balcony.

The number of passengers can also be a critical factor. Suites work better when the whole family

is sharing a cabin, as there is more space. If it is a family suite there are more bedrooms and bathrooms. Balcony cabins, with the natural light and fresh air, are also helpful when there are more people in the cabin.

For passengers who don't do well with the ship motion, a cabin centrally located on a lower deck will help with the overall ship movement, but then again natural light and fresh air of a balcony can help as well.

See the beautiful mountains in Alaska.



Is first class air worth the extra cost?

Traveling by air can be a miserable experience or a really luxurious experience based on where in the plane someone sits and the flight length. Premium seating make long flights to far away lands more comfortable.

Coach/economy/cattle car class, or whatever you call it, it is where most people are seated. Within that section of the plane there are better and worse seats. Of course sitting there and looking forward, many see people enjoying fine food and much more personal space as well as more attentive service throughout the flight.

For many, where the extra cost do not

put a strain on budgets opt for first class travel. This allows them to enjoy the better seats and service. Food and beverages are also included with first class travel where they may have a charge in the back of the plane. They justify the extra expense based on the service and space. Many thus ask is it really worth the extra cost involved?

I've enjoyed international business class and domestic first class seats many times. Often I've been able to use frequent flyer miles for the trips which really make it extra nice, since it was not cash out of my pocket. For flights of 10-16 hours it really is nice to have the extra

room and more attentive crew. The better food really helps as well. In my mind the extra miles were worth it. When I paid again it was worth the differential.

What if the differential is several times the cost of coach? In those cases it depends on how much time is planned at the destination, and the purpose of the visit. If the visit is for business and one must be top of the game shortly after the flight the extra cost is worth it. When it is for pleasure and a long vacation is planned maybe saving on the flight and instead splurging on the resort is better.

What cruise destinations are hot for 2013?

2013 is rapidly becoming the year for the Asian cruise. Royal Caribbean International will sail two Voyager Class ships sailing year round in Asia. Princess also made schedule adjustments for two ships to ply the Asian waters as well. This represents a lot of available cabins to sell, but the cruise lines have found selling shorter cruises is filling the cabins at fairly high rates.

From a cruise line vantage sold out sailings with high daily rates for cabins is the key to success. Of course for passengers it just

makes the vacation more expensive. This is happening in Asia right now.

The Asian cruises are great for those who want a flavor of the Orient. With a choice of ships, cruise destinations, American cruise lines, and a choice of cruise lengths these are great opportunities.

There are a few options to cruise to and from Asia from other areas of the world as ships move in and out of the region. Princess has some nice sailings to/from Alaska that offer stops

in Alaskan ports seldom visited by cruise ships to make it even nicer.

We really enjoyed our Asian cruise a couple years back. We tried a repositioning cruise from Singapore to Shanghai and really had a blast. We coupled the cruise with some pre and post cruise nights in the respective cities, making it an even better vacation.

If you want to see Asia combining land and a cruise a great vacation experience.

Combine an African Safari while helping Orphans in Africa or helping to expand the reach of faith based hospitals in Africa.

Is cruising when a big group is on the same ship a bad idea?

Many people love to cruise as part of groups. Others want to avoid big groups on ships as they feel the groups often take over venues and even the entire ship for their own needs to the detriment of the remaining guests. Finding out about big groups on a cruise is not something the cruise line will just offer up for the asking. The information must be sought out from other sources. It may not even be relevant, but for those with concerns about big groups it may be worth checking

to see if any exist.

The presence of a big group does not necessarily mean the ship will be run differently than normal.

Neither does it mean the cruise will be a bust because of the group. Also group status does not indicate other passengers will get special benefits.

When the group is one that could be upsetting to other passengers typically a full ship charter is required. Groups such as nudists fall into this category.

Most groups are pretty much like

the run of the mill passengers and do not cause any problems. Most groups don't hold constant activities which interfere with other passengers.

It ends up a personal choice in most cases, if a particular group would bother the passengers it is worth making sure they will not be aboard. If not, then go forward and plan to enjoy your cruise.

More Old World Sights when cruising Europe.



Brooks Cruise Services

11606 Highgrove Dr
Houston, TX 77077

Phone: 713-429-1487
Fax: 281-946-5113
E-mail:
David@BrooksCruiseServices.com

Brooks Cruise Services provides expert guidance in planning your vacation experience to include pre and post cruise planning as well as shipboard and port excursions.

With many cruises sailed personally to various parts of the world we have actual knowledge of these products.

We strive to provide a vacation experience that is beyond your expectations.

Is a cruise a good honeymoon choice?

Honeymoons are one of the most important vacations most couples ever experience together. They are a celebration of the wedding along with a break from the old and the beginning of the new life together as a couple under one roof.

Honeymoons can be as simple as getting away to a nearby town for a couple of nights or as exquisite as a private yacht charter through beautiful waters to great ports of call. In between are so many possibilities. Cruising on large cruise ships among other passengers has always been one of the more popular ways to celebrate the new marriage.

Taking a cruise for the honeymoon is great for so many reasons. First, unless the wedding is aboard the ship, typically the couple is away from the rest of the wedding party so they can have some "alone" time without having to entertain others. Additionally because the ship (aka floating hotel) moves with the passengers from port to port, the couple can see many places while not having to pack and

fly between different destinations. Top that with all one cares to eat food, typically good food and the picture becomes clearer it is a great honeymoon vacation.

Often the ships will host one or more special events on board for honeymoon couples. Most ships go out of their way to make the honeymoon a grand experience for couple. There are add on options that will allow the couple to enjoy additional special experiences as a couple, such as couples massages, special dinners, special breakfasts on the balcony, and romance packages including a wide range of goodies for the couple.

Picking the right cruise is important to a grand honeymoon experience. Going on a cheap deal to Alaska is great for some, while others only like going to the Caribbean. Other folks want to be away from crowds and prefer Hawaii cruises or perhaps more adventurous cruises in Asia or the South Pacific. Still others like cruising the waters around Australia and New Zealand. It is important to pick a cruise to a

destination appealing to the couple. Thus, the cheapest cruise deal is not always the best. Also considered are cabin preferences which may be key to happiness on any cruise. This is a major vacation so it should be done right.

Picking the right cruise ship is also important. We work with clients to understand their preferences in lodging and overall experiences. This will allow us to recommend a ship that will make the couple happy to be on a cruise. Factors considered are willingness to cruise with families and children vs. primarily looking to cruise with older couples and no children.

Ultimately, cruising represents a great value in vacationing and that carries over to honeymoons as well. We love to work with honeymoon couples and can even facilitate options where friends and family can help pay for the honeymoon cruise for the lucky couple.

We are here to help plan the ideal honeymoon based on your needs and desires.