



Maximize Your
CRUISE & DESTINATION
Experience



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Introduction

M*aximize Your Cruise and Destination Experience* is a go-to manual with the latest information from books, articles, interviews with world cruisers, and our own personal travel experiences to help you more fully enjoy both your onboard experiences and portside adventures.

More specifically, this book provides a timeline, a guide to step you through the preparation processes. It also offers travel-tested ideas about topics such as getting the best cruise values, finding a free house or pet sitter, understanding the big picture in terms of travel insurance, streamlining the packing process, juggling your money while overseas, navigating your port experiences, enjoying your sea days, and so much more.

Because it contains more than 250 photos from around the globe, *Maximize*... will pull you into the destinations introducing you to the people and sites pictured. The book will also enlighten you with spirited anecdotes, unforgettable stories, and poignant quotes that will serve to enhance your reading enjoyment.

Although designed to emphasize cruising, over 85% of this book is equally relevant to travelers in general, no matter what mode of transportation you choose.

Enjoy your next adventure! We look forward to meeting and conversing with you through our blog at worldsailaway@wordpress.com and/or our website at www.maxyourcruise.com.



ONE

In the Beginning

Most of us imagine that when we have the time, we'll take that cruise, and it will be wonderful. We envision all the places we'll visit; the choices are almost endless. We'll do it when winter comes. Winter came, though, and we had made no plans. We say we'll do it in the summer, but summer came... and on and on until five to seven years have passed us by. It's time to set ourselves in motion. It's time to take action!

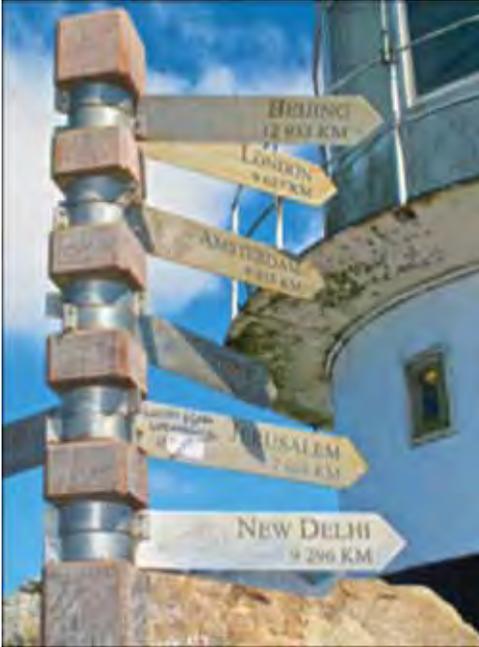
**How do we plan for a cruise?
We begin by dreaming! ~ It's as simple as that!**

DREAM ABOUT THE PLACES YOU'LL GO. With whom do you want to travel? How long will you be gone? What is most important for you and your travel companion to see and do?

Write down your answers, putting them in order of importance, as you dream about the delightful voyage you will savor and always remember.

WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO?

Your dream itinerary truly is the perfect starting place. Unearth your bucket list and see what destinations you've jotted down. Investigate how to mesh some of them together through a particular cruise. Add a few transitions, some specific experiences, a little spice, at least



1.2

Where the Indian Ocean and Atlantic Ocean meet outside Cape Town, South Africa

one splurge; and before you know it, you’ve put together an adventure worthy of pursuit.

Beyond dreaming, spend time reviewing travel and cruise magazines as well as Internet sites that focus on where to go and what to see. Books such as Patricia Shultz’s *1,000 Places To See Before You Die* can stimulate your thought processes about what to add or eliminate. If you end up with a few holes in your plan, request the assistance of a travel professional.

WITH WHOM DO YOU WANT TO TRAVEL?

That question should be easy to answer, but if you think about it, you probably know many people with whom you can travel; choosing may even be difficult.

For years we talked about a sister trip but weren’t able to get it off the ground. Finally, opportunity knocked. We packed our bags, left town, and had a fabulous adventure together. We each had special dreams of destinations and activities that could be accomplished

1.3

**Gondolas in Venice,
Italy**

through this cruise. Dinner was always special, as we shared our experiences ashore and described the people we met during the day. What was somewhat unconventional was that Mary Jane's husband stayed home while we wandered the globe, so you may want to think outside of the box when it comes to choosing travel companions.

How about taking your children or grandchildren on a cruise with you? If you do take children, just make certain the cruise you choose has programs specifically geared to the interests of children or teens.

Also consider the interests and desires of your travel companion(s). For example, if you want to book a cruise focusing on jazz music and your partner is not a jazz fan, you may want to look further or seek counterbalancing activities; but then again, you don't have to do everything together. Sometimes it's more fun to venture



2.1

St. Basil's Cathedral on Red Square, Moscow, Russia



TWO

Yes, You Need a Travel Agent

WHY DO YOU NEED THE SERVICES of a local travel professional? The Internet has all the travel information you could ever need: guidebooks, journals, timetables, magazine articles, and great photographs. Plus, you can book your cruise tickets through any one of numerous websites, including those of the cruise lines.

Let's give this question a different spin: Your seven-year-old daughter has broken her leg. Using the Internet, you can locate all the information and even the tools and materials necessary to set a broken bone. Would you set her leg yourself? No, of course not! Why, then, wouldn't you use the services of a travel agent, not only to book a cruise but also to be a guide-by-your-side every step of the way, particularly when, in most cases, the services of travel professionals are free?

Would it surprise you to learn that according to Jane Wooldridge, contributing cruise editor of *Travel + Leisure*, "Eighty percent of cruisers still book through a travel agent." Here are three major reasons why:

- In almost all instances, a travel professional will be able to secure the same or better pricing than you can get over the Internet or directly through a cruise line.
- The travel advisor's knowledge and expertise, acquired through training and years of experience, are invaluable in assisting you to make important decisions throughout the process of selecting an itinerary as well as a ship and cabin.
- A travel agent serves as your advocate and advisor throughout the process, from before you book the cruise until you return home.

TRAVEL AGENTS CAN SECURE A BETTER PRICE

The pricing of cruises purchased through Internet retailers and the cruise lines themselves tend to be comparable. Chances are, however, you will be able to obtain a better price through a travel agent, particularly one who specializes in cruising.

Travel professionals not only know where, when, and how to look for the best pricing, but their strong working relationships with cruise suppliers and their association with consolidators and consortiums help them negotiate extra benefits for their clients (for example, free or inexpensive stateroom upgrades, reduced single-supplement prices, onboard credits, free or less expensive airfare). Cruise lines often communicate promotions and special deals to travel agencies prior to advertising them over the Internet (see, for example, “Booking Late” in **Chapter 21** for one such offer). Additionally, some agencies purchase blocks of space on a ship and offer it to clients at reduced group rates. Frequently travel agencies will also give their clients value-added benefits such as shipboard credit, dinner at a specialty restaurant, and so forth. Agents also will be able to tell you about cruise lines that might better match your needs.

After you have booked, online retailers and the cruise lines won't let you know that a new promotion will lower your fare by



2.2

Beach in
Madagascar

several hundred dollars, but travel advisors track the fluctuating cruise prices for you; and when they find a lower price, in most cases they will be able to arrange a reduction in your fare, obtain onboard credit, or secure a free or inexpensive stateroom upgrade to compensate you for the fare reduction. Travelers who booked online often learn too late that the price that looked good on the Internet didn't include the fees listed in fine print or contain the same extras offered through a travel agency.

The cruise fare you see advertised is not the price you'll end up paying. On mass-market lines, the advertised fares for the smallest windowless cabins are usually so incomplete as to be virtually meaningless. They don't include an array of mandatory charges such as taxes and port fees that can add hundreds of dollars to your overall bill.

—WENDY PERRIN, "Insider Tips on Cruise Deals"



2.3

Eiffel Tower in Paris, France

Travel professionals can ascertain whether it is less or more expensive to purchase an airline ticket on your own rather than through the cruise line. They can also determine if it makes more sense to book a luxury line that includes more shipboard expenses in the upfront price than a line that appears to offer a lower price. What about the "free airfare" some cruise lines offer? How much will you actually pay for it? Perrin, in the article mentioned above, suggests

using a travel agent to learn the upfront cost of a cruise without first putting down a deposit.

Say you're intrigued by a Deluxe cruise offer of free airfare and two-for-one cruise fares in Europe. The advertised price for a fourteen-day cruise from Istanbul to Venice in a penthouse suite is \$7,499 per person, yet the total for two on the invoice is a whopping \$18,870. Why? First of all, the "free airfare" actually costs \$1,018 in air-related taxes, fuel surcharges, and ticketing fees. Government fees, taxes, security, and handling charges total \$728. Airport-to-ship and ship-to-airport transfers add on \$344; insurance, \$1,684; and Turkish visas, \$98. That's how you reach \$18,870.

TRAVEL AGENTS OFFER KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

Saving money is definitely a benefit, but many people believe that the most important reason to work with a travel professional is the knowledge, expertise, and experience they provide.

You can save only so much money on a cruise, but you can never stop making a trip better and more interesting, and there is always something you don't know about.

—LARRY OLMSTED, travel writer for Forbes

Which ship has the atmosphere that will best suit your lifestyle and interests? What cabin makes the most sense, given your proclivities and budget? Do you have the right documentation to enter China? Which travel insurance should you purchase? Which cruise lines offer senior citizen discounts if one person in the cabin is over fifty-five? What about discounts for military service? A travel agent easily answers these and many other questions.

Not only do travel consultants have firsthand information about the features and quirks of cruise lines, ships, and destinations, but also good travel professionals make a point of getting to know you, your interests, likes and dislikes, to help you choose the right cruise,



4.1

East entrance bridge to the Hortus Botanicus in Amsterdam, Netherlands



FOUR

Purchasing Travel Insurance

At Flamingo Gardens near Fort Lauderdale, Florida, a large sign lists a number of rules to follow when walking in the bird aviary. Failing to heed Rule 14 can be life changing:

RULE 14: DO NOT LOOK UP WITH YOUR MOUTH OPEN

An equally important rule should be posted everywhere for travelers to see:

RULE 15: PURCHASE TRAVEL INSURANCE PRIOR TO TRAVELING OVERSEAS

Failure to follow Rule 15 can also be life altering.

This chapter underscores the importance of taking seriously the decision of whether or not to purchase travel insurance. Actually, we wouldn't go on an overseas trip without it.

The U.S. Medicare program does not provide coverage for hospitals and other medical expenses outside the United States.

As with all insurance, you purchase travel insurance hoping you'll never have to use it. However, depending on where you are in the world and your condition, costs can easily range from \$20,000 to \$75,000 to airlift you back to your home country or to a country with high-quality medical facilities. This doesn't even include hospital and other medical costs.

Determine the amount of money you are paying for the cruise itself and other major expenses, such as air transportation. Are you comfortable losing that amount of money? A couple from South Carolina learned the hard way about the importance of travel insurance.

June and Jim signed up for a seven-week cruise from Bangkok to San Francisco to celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary. Their travel agent strongly advised them to invest in trip insurance, but Jim viewed it as an unnecessary expense. A few weeks before the trip, June fell and fractured her arm. Following surgery, she was healing quite nicely, and the couple began the trip by spending two days in Bangkok prior to boarding the ship. By then, however, June was not feeling well. Because of her symptoms, the ship doctor would not allow her to stay onboard, and the couple was transferred to a hospital, where June endured multiple surgeries and physical rehabilitation, staying at the medical facility for three weeks. When she was able to travel again, they flew to Tokyo and met the ship on the day of their fiftieth anniversary.

The morning after their celebration dinner, June developed blood clots in her leg. She was again put off the ship and transferred to a hospital in Tokyo. Once she was stabilized three days later, they took a flight back to the United States. None of their accrued expenses were paid for through their personal medical insurance carrier. Everything was an out-of-pocket expense.

Prior to purchasing travel insurance, review the policies you already have. Most medical insurance is not accepted outside of the U.S.; however, some health insurance policies do cover medical emergencies overseas, and your homeowner's policy or your credit card company may cover baggage loss, some medical assistance, and so forth.

Verify exactly what your proposed travel insurance policy does and does not cover. Travel insurance policies vary widely, depending on the company you use, the options you choose, and the price.

While on the cruise, do you plan to participate in what might be called "extreme activities" such as scuba diving, hiking at high altitudes, spelunking, and such? If so, ensure these activities are covered.



SIX

Finding a Free House/Pet Sitter

*It isn't just a matter of paying money; it's the arranging.
We have a dog. What do you do with your dog for two months?*

—ROBERT ROWLANDS,
world traveler from England

IF YOU'RE LIKE Robert and are planning a cruise of a month or more, you will likely experience concerns about leaving your home and pets for that amount of time. Asking family or friends to watch over your home may be reasonable, but it may get old after two or three weeks of bringing in the mail, watering the plants, and so forth.

If you don't have pets, you might consider leaving your home unattended; however, empty houses are natural targets for burglaries, and unless someone is living in your home, no one may notice if a pipe breaks or the freezer stops working. In addition, unless friends or family members have an established (and perhaps loving) relationship with your pet(s), the burden of caring for them may be too much of an imposition. Here is an appealing option: use the services of a house/pet sitter agency that helps you find a sitter who will take care of your home, pets, and property for *free*.

Usually there is no charge to those listing their home with an agency, while potential sitters are charged a nominal annual fee—from \$20 to \$75—to receive notifications of house sitting opportunities for the geographic areas in which they have indicated an interest. Although several agencies are listed on the Internet under “house sitters,” the following will get you started in your search:



EIGHTEEN

Interacting with Locals

In 20 years' time, that Gucci handbag will not have made a difference to your life and will be a distant memory. The night you spent in a tent guarded by a Masai warrior while lions roamed outside, however, won't ever be forgotten.

—CAZ MAKEPEACE

YOU MAY BELIEVE it's impossible to make any kind of meaningful contact with locals, because you will spend only one to three days in each port; however, through the stories below, you will see that brief, even fleeting, interactions will give you joy and a deeper understanding of the people living in and around your destination ports.

To give you a feeling for the difference between *being in* a culture and *interacting with the people of* that culture, visit the following

18.2

Lion at South Luangwa
National Park, Zambia



website: www.wherethehellismatt.com/videos. On the upper portion of the site, click Videos. Scroll down and watch a minute or two of the video titled *Dancing 2006*. After watching that video, return to the top of the page and click *Dancing 2012*. What a dramatic difference interacting with the locals makes!

CREATING SMILES WITH YOUR CAMERA

Conventional wisdom suggests it's a mistake to take a large camera and lens with you, if you want to blend in and interact with locals; however, we have found that our cameras actually provide an entrée to people. We're not the only ones. The last day of a world cruise, the question at the morning audience participation show, "Good Morning Amsterdam" was "What experience was the most memorable for you?" A woman raised her hand and said,

It was my relationship with my camera. In a lecture, photographer David Smith gave us lots of great tips on interacting with people. Among them was to take pictures of children and show them their pictures on the back of the camera because they get excited when they see themselves. I was nervous about doing it, but I went up to a group of kids, took their pictures, and shared with them. They got all tickled. The mothers wanted to see the pictures too, so I asked if they wanted their pictures taken, and a number of them did. They got excited when they saw theirs, and then some of the men standing around wanted their pictures taken too, so it sort of snowballed.

What went through my mind as I listened to her story was that she was transformed. No longer a tourist, a mere observer, she was a traveler interacting with the locals.

David Smith also suggested the importance of being in an area for a period of time before approaching people to take their pictures.

**18.9**

Having fun with a skateboard, Havana, Cuba

Once you have communicated and interacted with people of a country, you no longer think of your destinations as simply regions in the world outside of you, because they aren't. They are places with which you have a connection; they are peopled by those with whom you have spent time, even though you may only have been able to communicate through sign language.

A passage from Geraldine Brooks's novel titled *People of the Book* captures what may be true of those who do not travel. A man in the story conveys how he believes outsiders viewed the siege in Sarajevo:

You, all of you from the safe world, with your air bags and your tamper-proof packaging and your fat-free diets... you sat in your nice little flat all through our war and watched us bleeding all over the TV news. And you thought, "How awful," and then you got up and made yourself another cup of gourmet coffee.

No, he is wrong, particularly about travelers. We don't merely make ourselves another cup of coffee; we don't simply go on as usual. How can we? We do care; we are concerned. The people we meet do not necessarily represent their governments any more than we do. Just as human beings from around the world responded from their hearts to such tragedies in the U.S. as 9/11, Katrina, the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings, and so many others, we are and forever will be sensitive to the people living in the lands we have visited.

**18.10**

Children curious about foreigners visiting their school in Nha Trang, Vietnam



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