Your Ocean Cruise Guide

Presented by

ELITE EXPLORERS

WHERE ADVENTURES BECOME REALITY

GATEWAY TRAVEL

PARTNER

A checklist from booking to coming home



Start planning your cruise

Use this guide to plan a smoother cruise and avoid last-minute decisions. Start with travel documents, insurance and transportation, then complete each step as its date approaches. Elite Explorers can help you confirm the requirements for your sailing.

Timing below is our planning recommendation unless a cruise-line rule is identified. Your booking confirmation, cruise app and travel documents control the actual deadlines. This guide is designed for ocean cruises; river and expedition cruises may have different procedures.

As soon as you book

- ☐ Check your confirmation. Verify each legal name against the travel document, sailing dates, ship, stateroom, itinerary and dining selection. Save your booking number.
- ☐ Record your deposit, final payment and cancellation deadlines. These vary by booking; do not assume a standard 90-day deadline.
- ☐ Verify required documents for every traveler and every destination, including passport validity, visas or entry authorizations and documents for minors. Start applications or renewals promptly. A passport book is strongly recommended for international cruises, including itineraries that permit alternatives, because an emergency flight home may require it. [1]
- ☐ Create your cruise-line account, link your reservation and download the official app. Add calendar reminders for check-in and reservations.



Protect your trip and plan your arrival

Travel insurance belongs at the beginning

- ☐ Review insurance when you make your first trip payment. Ask immediately about time-sensitive benefits such as a pre-existing condition exclusion waiver or optional Cancel For Any Reason coverage. Eligibility and purchase windows vary by policy and state; do not wait until final payment. [2–3]
- ☐ Compare covered cancellation and interruption reasons, travel delay and missed-connection benefits, baggage protection, emergency medical care and medical evacuation. Check limits, exclusions and any activity restrictions. Confirm what your existing health insurance covers outside the country.
- ☐ Include the full travel period, including pre-cruise and post-cruise stays, and the required trip costs. Ask how and when to add later purchases. Keep your policy number and the insurer's emergency assistance contact. Coverage is governed by the policy; cancellation for any reason is not automatically included and may reimburse only part of the cost. [2–3]

Soon after booking and before final payment

- ☐ Plan to arrive at least one day before sailing if flying to the departure port. Consider two or more days for international travel, winter weather or complicated connections. This is our recommendation to reduce delay risk; arriving early cannot guarantee boarding.
- ☐ If driving locally on sailing day, allow a generous traffic buffer. For a long drive, consider an overnight stay near the port. Arrange a hotel, parking and transportation to the correct cruise terminal.
- ☐ Before buying return flights, confirm the cruise line's earliest recommended flight time for your port and airport. Allow time for getting off the ship, customs, transfers and airport security; the ship's arrival time is not your airport arrival time.
- ☐ Tell us early about mobility assistance, accessibility, dietary needs or medical equipment. Confirm submission deadlines and obtain the cruise line's approval where required.



Choose your shore experiences

Excursions as soon as reservations open

- ☐ Choose your must-do experiences early, especially limited-capacity tours. Do not wait for a suggested 60- or 90-day milestone if booking is already available. Reserve and pay when required to secure your place.
- ☐ Compare what is included, activity level, walking distances, age restrictions, accessibility, transportation, meeting point, tour duration and cancellation terms. Check whether a quoted price is per person or per group.
- ☐ For independent tours, verify the operator, delay assistance and refund policy if the ship skips the port. Allow a generous return buffer. Do not assume the ship will wait for you; review the specific protection offered by cruise-line tours.
- ☐ Save receipts and confirmations. Review tour times again if the itinerary changes. Some ports use tender boats; factor in the time needed to get ashore.

About 60 to 90 days before departure or earlier if available

- ☐ Review dining, shows, spa appointments, children's programs and other reservations as they become available. Check charges and cancellation rules before reserving.
- ☐ Set a spending budget for excursions, packages, specialty dining, gratuities or service charges, transportation and souvenirs. Check what your fare or promotional bundle already includes.
- ☐ Confirm final payment was received by the booking deadline. Review the itinerary and make sure flights, hotel and transfers still fit your sailing.

A useful planning habit

Keep one folder with your cruise confirmation, flights, hotel, transfers, excursion receipts and insurance. Save copies offline so you can find them without Wi-Fi. Keep your advisor's contact information with your travel documents.



Choose your drink package

Compare the total additional cost with what you realistically expect to use. Package prices, inclusions and purchase deadlines vary by ship and sailing. Use the current offer for your reservation, including taxes and service charges.

Drink package decision before the purchase deadline

- ☐ List what you would actually buy each day: alcoholic drinks, specialty coffee, bottled water, soda and other paid beverages. Account for long port days and beverages already included in your fare.
- ☐ Compare the full package cost for every required guest and charged day with pay-as-you-go spending. Check drink price limits, daily limits, excluded beverages and whether private destinations are included.
- ☐ Check whether other adults in your stateroom must also purchase a package, and whether an exception is available. Policies vary. For example, Royal Caribbean requires alcoholic packages for all guests of legal drinking age in the same stateroom. Do not assume packages may be shared. [4]

Simple comparison: estimated paid drink spending for the whole cruise versus the package's total checkout price. For a beverage-only example, if the all-in daily package is $90 and your all-in average drink cost is $15, the break-even point is 6 paid drinks per day. These are illustrative amounts, not current prices. Include nonalcoholic purchases and compare the whole stateroom when other guests must buy.



Choose your Wi-Fi and other extras

Wi-Fi decision before the purchase deadline

☐ Decide what you need: occasional messaging, email, video calls, streaming or work. Check the plan's supported services, data or time limits and number of devices connected at once.

☐ Check for internet already included in your fare or loyalty benefits. Compare a full-cruise plan with any shorter options available. Verify whether the ship's app or onboard messaging works without a paid internet plan.

☐ Confirm roaming and maritime charges with your mobile carrier. Ship Wi-Fi is separate from cellular service at sea. Plan to use airplane mode with Wi-Fi enabled onboard to avoid unintended cellular connections.

Choose a plan for the access you need, while allowing for slower speeds or interruptions. If connectivity is essential for work, ask about the ship and plan before relying on it.

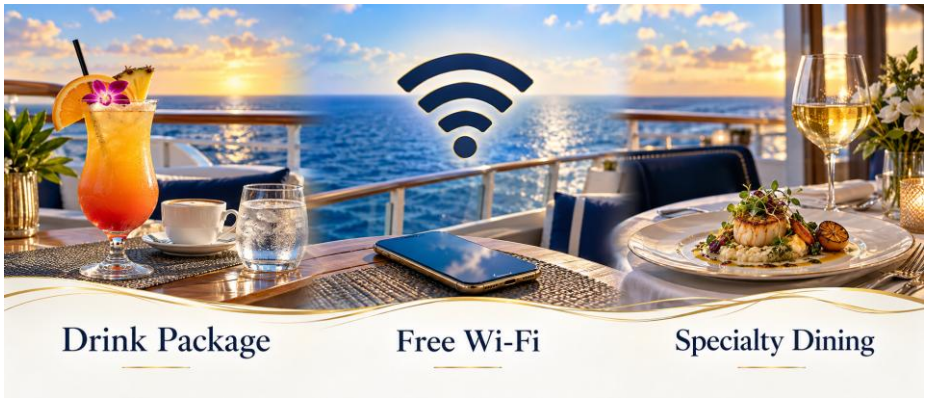
Before buying any package

☐ Compare a bundled fare or upgrade with buying individual extras. Add only benefits you will use and avoid paying twice for items already included.

☐ Check gratuities and service charges separately. Drink-package service charges may not cover the daily stateroom and dining gratuities. Confirm how each charge is collected.

☐ Read refund, cancellation and repricing rules. A pre-cruise promotion may offer savings, but a lower future price is not guaranteed.

My decision: Drinks _____ Wi-Fi _____
Total additional cost _____ Purchase deadline _____



Complete your online check in

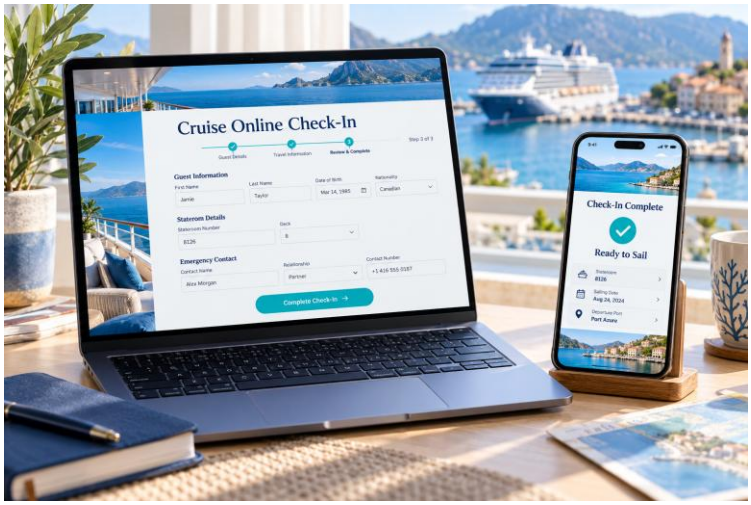
When online check in opens

☐ Complete check-in promptly for every traveler and select a terminal arrival appointment if offered. Have travel-document details, a security photo if requested, emergency contact and onboard payment method ready.

Examples checked October 5, 2026: Royal Caribbean app check-in generally opens 45 days before sailing; Norwegian's window is 21 to 3 days before sailing; Carnival's is within 14 days before sailing through midnight Eastern time before departure. Follow the opening date and cutoff shown for your reservation, including any priority access. [5–7]

☐ Save or print boarding passes and luggage tags as instructed. Online check-in does not replace bringing your original required travel documents.

☐ Record your terminal arrival appointment and the separate final check-in or boarding cutoff. Your appointment is when to arrive at the terminal, not a guaranteed time to step aboard. Do not plan around the latest cutoff.



Prepare and pack for departure

One to two weeks before departure

- ☐ Reconfirm flights, hotel, transfers, port address, terminal and parking. Check the cruise line's messages for changes and reconfirm your return-flight timing.
- ☐ Review baggage limits and the cruise line's prohibited-items policy, including rules for alcohol, beverages, irons, extension cords and power strips. Airline rules may differ.
- ☐ Pack medications in your carry-on, preferably in original labeled containers, with enough for a possible delay. Check destination restrictions and make arrangements for medical equipment in advance.
- ☐ Pack comfortable shoes, destination-appropriate layers, sun protection, swimwear, chargers and any required dining attire. Arrange home, pet and mail care.
- ☐ Verify payment-card limits and overseas use. Budget small bills for optional tips and port purchases. Save important phone numbers and document copies securely.

One to three days before departure

- ☐ Complete any health questionnaire when the cruise line makes it available. Check travel alerts, weather and airline notifications. If a delay develops, contact your advisor and the relevant travel provider promptly.
- ☐ Charge your phone and save documents offline. Put luggage tags on checked bags according to the line's instructions. Keep original documents out of checked luggage.

Your boarding day carry on

Original required travel documents • boarding pass • medications and medical essentials • phone and charger • payment card and valuables • insurance contact details • a change of clothes and anything needed before your checked bags arrive.

Keep these items with you through the terminal and onto the ship. Checked luggage may reach your stateroom later in the day.



Board and enjoy your cruise

Boarding day

- ☐ Arrive at the correct terminal during your selected appointment, allowing time for your transfer, traffic and bag drop. Follow the sailing-specific cutoff in your documents; boarding closes before the scheduled departure.
- ☐ Keep documents and your boarding pass accessible. Hand tagged checked bags to designated port staff and carry your essentials aboard.
- ☐ Complete the required safety briefing and muster procedures. Confirm dining, excursions and any reservations you could not make before departure.
- ☐ Set your phone to airplane mode and enable Wi-Fi as needed. Learn how to access the daily schedule, guest services and emergency information.

During the cruise and before every port visit

- ☐ Read the daily schedule and monitor your onboard account. Ask guest services promptly about unexpected charges.
- ☐ Before leaving the ship, confirm the all-aboard time and whether ship time differs from local time. Set a return alarm using ship time and allow a generous buffer.
- ☐ Carry the required identification, cruise card and the ship's local port agent contact. Follow the ship's guidance about carrying your passport ashore. Keep valuables secure.
- ☐ If you need medical care or travel assistance, contact the appropriate onboard service and your insurer's assistance team. Follow any required authorization process and keep receipts and supporting records.



Plan for a smooth return home



The day before you get off the ship

- ☐ Review departure instructions, luggage tags, assigned departure time and breakfast options. Choose self-carry luggage only if you can safely manage all your bags.
- ☐ Reconfirm your transfer and flight. If putting luggage outside your stateroom, keep documents, medications, valuables, toiletries and the next day's clothing with you.
- ☐ Check your account statement and resolve questions before departure. Check the safe, drawers, outlets and bathroom for personal items.



Your sailing details

Traveler _____
Ship _____
Sailing date _____
Booking number _____
Final payment due _____
Check-in opens _____
Insurance purchase deadline _____
Policy number _____
Arrival appointment _____
Final boarding cutoff _____
Pre-cruise hotel _____
Port transfer _____
Advisor _____
Advisor phone _____

Helpful contacts and references

Thank you for allowing Elite Explorers to be part of your journey. If you have questions before you leave or need assistance while traveling, please give us a call.

Your Next Adventure Starts with One Conversation.

Elite Explorers is here to help

Picayune, MS (769) 242-1527 • Covington, LA (504) 390-2934
Slidell, LA (504) 495-5810 • Boston, MA (203) 641-6447
www.elite-explorers.com • info@elite-explorers.com

Where Adventures Become Reality

Official references

1 U.S. Department of State cruise travel Open reference
2 Allianz existing medical conditions Open reference
3 Travel Guard optional cancellation coverage Open reference
4 Royal Caribbean beverage packages Open reference
5 Royal Caribbean app check in Open reference
6 Norwegian cruise preparation Open reference
7 Carnival online check in Open reference

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