

# Ten Things I Wish I Knew Before My Disney Cruise - Part 1: A Disney Cruise Line Review

by Lori Ketcherside, PassPorter Guest Contributor

☐ After already selecting a Disney Cruise Line (DCL) ship, choosing the best date and itinerary for your dream vacation, after all of the major travel arrangements, hotels and airfare are booked, and after port adventures, spa appointments and adult-exclusive dining reservations are secured, you may wonder ... what's next?

☐ A friend of mine recently spent a bit of time picking my brain about Pirate Night and Port Adventures and eventually reached a point where she asked me, "What would you want to know if it were your first Disney cruise?" I pulled up short.

**☐ What would I want to know? Where would I start? In short, what next? I love lists, so here is a list of the top ten things to know before your first cruise.**

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☐1.) What do I wear? Ball gowns and tiaras, of course! (Kidding...) Formal, Semi-Formal, Cruise Casual, Optional Dress-Up, or Pirate will be noted as the evening attire on the front corner of your Personal Navigator each day. Although Disney lists limits on dress (no swimwear in the dining rooms, etc.) on their website, what exactly do people "normally" wear? The answer really is whatever you find comfortable, since Formal ranges from ballgown to Sunday Best and Cruise Casual everything that is more casual than that. No matter what end of the closet you pack, I recommend at least one of the outfits features elastic. If you are prone to overeating, these may come in handy after several days of buffets and room service.

☐2.) Booking Port Arrival Time: When you do your online check-in (which is available after you've paid in full, but before you cruise) you can select a Port Arrival Time. That's the time you are able to enter the port, hand over luggage to a porter, head through security and begin check-in. It is NOT a boarding time. Boarding begins up to an hour after the first port arrival time (usually sometime around Noon). Note that if you use Disney transportation to the port, a port arrival time is not assigned and you are allowed into the terminal whenever your bus arrives.

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□3.) Dine in Style: Make sure to reserve any adult-only reservations in advance of your cruise. All booked? Don't worry, they hold some of the tables back until the cruise. You can make reservations in person on embarkation afternoon (check your Navigator for location and hours).

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□4.) Travel Agents: If you have a Disney Authorized Travel Agent who is knowledgeable about DCL, they can help you manage reservations, look out for promotions that pop up and give you the inside scoop. Some from larger agencies offer gift baskets or onboard credits as a perk of booking with them. The travel agent will retain control of the reservation until after it is paid in full and until then, reservations for adult dining, Port Adventures, spa, and the like can be made through them or on your own. Regardless of whether you book through an agency or Disney directly, you will receive the same rate on your cruise. I've done both and both work great!

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□5.) Bathtubs and Split Baths: Almost all DCL staterooms feature a bathtub, with the exception of some of the handicap-accessible rooms. As an average (short) adult, these are not large enough for me to take a bath, with the exception of the Jacuzzi tub in the royal suites. Some staterooms on the Dream and Fantasy have round bathtubs rather than the standard squared-off tubs. Conveniently, most of the staterooms feature the restroom in a separate "split bath" so soaking does not interrupt another person preparing for the day.

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□6.) Mini-fridges, Soda Fountains, and Beverage Policies: Each stateroom contains either a cooling box or a mini-fridge for you to keep cold things cold. The pool deck features a complimentary drink station (sodas, coffee, tea, hot chocolate and water). Sodas are included at meals as well. Disney offers several alcoholic beverage packages onboard and allows a very lenient carry on alcohol policy. A few things to keep in mind, the drinking age is 21, no hard-sided coolers can be brought on board, and drinks you bring aboard must be in your carry-on, rather than with your checked bags.

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□7.) Day Bag Dos and Don'ts: The bag you carry with you when you first board the ship, your "day bag," must fit through a standard airport security-style scanner. (The maximum recommended dimensions are 22 inches wide, 14 inches high and 9 inches deep.) What goes in your day bag? Passports or other allowed proof of citizenship, travel documents, completed and signed cruise documents, medication, valuables (jewelry, cash, purse), and anything you would like to have during your first afternoon on board. Ideas include swimwear and sunscreen, cameras, chargers, phones, anything your kids cannot

cruise without (favorite snack or their favorite stuffed bear, for example), necessary toiletries (contact lens solution), makeup or anything else delicate or valuable. My day bag contains one large Ziploc bag containing our cruise documents and passports, medication, makeup, pin trading lanyards, some granola bars, the kids's travel journals, and pens. One backpack is enough for the four of us. Keep in mind you will be toting it with you until your room is available around 1:30 or so. As far as don'ts, there is an extensive list on the DCL website. Some of the more innocuous items that should stay at home include balloons, irons, tape, over the door shoe holders, food that is open or homemade, Christmas lights, and portable fans. If in doubt, check with Disney.

□ 08.) Bandwidth, Reception and Free Wi-Fi: There is internet available online, but it costs quite a bit (currently \$0.25/MB, discounted packages available) and is considerably slower than land-based connections. The best internet reception onboard is generally in the internet cafes and on the uppermost decks. If you want to take advantage of free Wi-Fi in ports either look for Starbucks or ask a crew member before going ashore, many of them are familiar with places in each port to find free Wi-Fi.

□ 09.) One on One Time: We catch opportunities for whole-family gatherings at meals and shows, and really enjoy one-on-one time with the kids in between meals. So after we draw with our daughter at an animation class, she'll hit the kids' club while we play shuffleboard or shoot hoops with our son.

□ 10.) You Can Enjoy an Awesome Cruise on What's Included (How to Not Spend More Than Your Cruise Once You Board): While almost all food, entertainment, snacks, ice cream, room service, and activities are included, there are a couple of things you need to plan into your vacation budget. Shore excursions (Disney calls these Port Adventures), spa services, salon services, internet and phone, video arcades, photo packages, alcoholic beverages, packaged candy or soda cans from room service, non-alcoholic specialty drinks, specialty coffee drinks from the cafe, and any drink you get from a server around the pool is not included. Souvenirs aren't, either.

□ Full disclosure, on our first cruise our "extras" bill cost approximately the same amount we paid for cruise fare. In fairness, we got an awesome deal on the cruise fare and enjoyed cabana massages on Castaway Cay and adult dining. The Cove Cafe barista knew our names and our regular drinks. Worth every penny. Still feeling a bit adrift? I highly recommend [Passporter's Guide to the Disney Cruise Line](#). It helped us plan our first cruise and I still give copies to family and

friends heading on their first voyage.

*About The Author:*

☐Lori is a Christian, wife, mother of two, vegan, Texan, allergy expert in training, bookworm, runner, terrible-but-enthusiastic photographer, new homeschooler, and all around pixie dust nut! Even though she sunburns indoors on a cloudy day, she finds her #DisneySide at sea aboard the Disney Cruise Line! If you need to find her, check in with her blog, [Adventure in the Great Wide Somewhere](#).

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