

# When Is the Best Time to Board Your Disney Cruise Ship?: A Disney Cruise Line Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

□ Considering the best time to actually head on board a Disney cruise wasn't something that crossed my mind over the first few cruises we took.

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□ We always worked on the theory that we wanted to start our adventure at the earliest possible opportunity, and get on board, find our feet (and our room!) and start indulging in all that wonderful food. However, over the last couple of cruises we've taken with Disney, we've started to revise that approach.

□ It all started last summer when we cruised out of Venice with our friends, heading to Greece, some of the Greek islands, and Turkey. As our friends literally only landed in Venice just before midnight the night before our cruise, understandably they wanted to enjoy some time in this beautiful city before we headed over to the Magic. As a result, we planned the morning in Venice, and selected a much later than usual boarding time for us, between 2:00pm, and 2:30pm. Now all aboard time for this sailing was 4:00pm, and one reason we'd never previously opted for an afternoon boarding time is that we didn't want to cut things too close. Thankfully this time, we were masters of our own destiny, as we'd be walking, and taking the People Mover, a shuttle train service, over to the cruise terminal, which we knew ran every couple of minutes. If that went down, then trust me, Venice would have to put something in place to get passengers into the port, as it's the main means of getting there. It's a bit different to driving over to Port Canaveral, which is what we often do, where anything could happen, from an accident to a problem with your vehicle.

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□ In truth, we were much earlier than our predicted arrival, with times on the photos I took showing that we'd checked in somewhere around 1:30pm, and that we finally boarded about half an hour later. One advantage of boarding so late in the day was that we could head straight for our rooms, as these are usually ready from 1:30pm onwards. I really liked that, as we didn't have to hang around with our hand luggage, which I personally find quite restrictive. It's not too bad if you're part of a big group, as you can pretty much guarantee someone's always around to keep an eye on the group's bags, but when there's only two of

you, it does limit your options. You can't both head for the adult pool for example; even if you did remember to pack your swimming gear in that hand luggage!

□ However, of course there are always advantages and disadvantages to these things. The mandatory lifeboat drill did seem to come around very quickly, and it didn't feel as if we had much time to acclimatize to being on board before that. On our next cruise, in February 2015, we also found there was another disadvantage of boarding so late in the day, and this was a much more frustrating one. I went to look for a Navigator for the day, and there were none left, the first time I've ever run into that problem, and even more surprising, given this cruise was far from full, the first time in some years that we haven't been on a completely full sailing. It's something worth keeping in mind.

□ There are also downsides to boarding early, as we've experienced previously. The later you turn up, the less your boarding group assignment that you're given at check-in matters, being quite honest. We've arrived at the cruise terminal early in the day, and had to wait patiently, as one group after another was called, before our magic number was finally called. Later on in the day, it tends to be "free" boarding, meaning you're good to go, as soon as you're checked in, and have cleared security (note at Port Canaveral this is the other way around, but that's not always the case at every home port Disney Cruise Line calls at, as we discovered in Venice for example).

□ Something else to consider when deciding on your boarding time is whether there's anything you need to do on that first day. Have you dreamed of maybe snagging a reservation at Palo, and so far it's eluded you? Or perhaps you weren't happy with your seating time for dinner? While there are no guarantees, you should be able to make requests to change your seating time, and try for Palo reservations on boarding day. Somewhere that we always make a beeline for is the spa on boarding day, as we always get a length of cruise pass for the Rainforest, and that's only available when you board, with only one-day passes available ahead of time through the Disney Cruise Line website. The general rule of thumb is the more things you know you need to do when you board, the earlier you want to get on board to get it all done.

□ Keep in mind that on selected Disney cruises, they are now also distributing tickets for some of the most popular character meet and greets. For example, if you're lucky enough to be experiencing some of the Frozen festivities on a cruise this summer, there's every chance you'll need to get a ticket on boarding day from guest services to meet with Anna, Elsa or Olaf or even the Princess Gathering, and these are

available on a strictly first come, first served basis, so this may be a perfect reason to get on board as early in the day as you can&hellip;

□ How early you want to board may also depend on how badly you want to get your first fix of "free" food on a Disney cruise. If you've booked a hotel room for the day of your cruise that includes breakfast (or maybe you're lucky enough to be heading to a cruise from home and can eat there first?), then perhaps that's not so much of an issue. On our most recent cruise, we started the day with a wonderful character breakfast at 'Ohana, and unsurprisingly, after that, we didn't need more food for a large chunk of the day. Therefore, boarding later worked for us. On our forthcoming Alaskan cruise however, we don't have breakfast included at the Pan Pacific Vancouver, and while we know from previous experience, where to find McDonald's nearby, we probably will want to have lunch on board, so we've deliberately chosen an earlier boarding time for that trip.

□ Although for some of you, the boarding time for a Disney cruise may be an absolute no-brainer, because you already know exactly what time you want or you always go for the same time each cruise, perhaps this has given you food for thought, as there are advantages and disadvantages to heading on board at different times of the day. One thing's for sure though -- whatever time you get on board, and whenever you're cruising to, you're guaranteed to have a magical time.

*About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)*

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