

Amy's Top 10 Tips for Disney Cruise Line Port Adventures: A Disney Cruise Line Planning Article

by Amy Wear, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Though we are by no means Disney Cruise Line port adventure experts, my family has learned the importance of being prepared for your time ashore. My husband and I have done port adventures on three Western Caribbean cruises, which have resulted in the following top ten tips!

10. Eat a good breakfast on the ship (or lunch). If your port adventure meeting time is very early, be sure to put your breakfast room service order outside your door the night before. It could be several hours before you get to eat another real meal, so this is not the time to skip breakfast. If you have a mid-day excursion, eat "brunch" late morning or an early lunch.

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□9. Bring packaged snacks. We've learned the hard way that it's crucial to have packaged snacks with you when you go into port. Before you leave home, pack granola bars, crackers, energy bars, and so on in your suitcase for this purpose. These also come in handy for your journey to and from the ship.

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□We didn't bring enough granola bars to last us the whole day on a port adventure in Grand Cayman last year because the description said there would be opportunities to purchase food. We were out for about six hours with no lunch, only to discover that the only food available was junk food like chips, peanuts, and popsicles. While you may plan on picking something up, many of the organized tours take you to places where this just isn't possible.

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It's tempting to try to bring fresh food from the ship, but this is not allowed due to port authority rules and importation laws. Those who cruise often know which ports check your bags and which ones don't, but I can tell you they have dogs sniffing for food in Cozumel and one sniffed my banana before I had a chance to throw out the peeling.

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□8. Bring bottled water. If you read your Passporter's Guide to Disney Cruise Line carefully, you can get a good idea of which ports may be fine for drinking the water or drinks that are included. Since I'm a bottled water snob, I prefer to take no risks and bring bottled water with us from the ship or from the small case of water we carry onboard (another smart idea if you can get to a store before heading to the ship on embarkation day).

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□Speaking of bottled water, on our recent Disney Magic sailing you could buy a nice red Disney Cruise Line cooler bag on port days for \$11.95 or \$19.95 with six bottles of water. As onboard bottled water prices go, this is a decent deal.

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□7. Book excursions through the ship. Yes, it usually costs more, but there is too much at stake unless you absolutely know what you're doing.

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□Fact #1: If you are with a private tour not organized through the cruise line and miss all-ashore time, the ship will not wait for you. I repeat, the ship will not wait for you.

□Fact #2: If you pre-pay for a private tour not booked through the cruise line and the ship is unable to dock or changes course (which they always reserve the right to do), you will most likely not receive a refund; whereas, if you are booked through the cruise line, you'll receive a full refund for any port adventures that are canceled for this reason.

□Fact #3: Tours booked through the cruise line are insured and must maintain high safety standards for Disney to continue a relationship with them. You pay more for peace of mind.

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□On Western Caribbean itineraries, Falmouth, Jamaica is a port that is quite far from the tourist attractions like Dunn's River Falls in Ocho Rios. I strongly advise against booking any tours in this port that aren't through the cruise line for these reasons above.

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□6. Keep on-your-own exploring to the local area. Once again, this is a judgement call. If you can comfortably walk it and you are in one of the safer ports like Key West or Grand Cayman, you are probably fine. Our family walked almost two miles each direction in 85-degree heat (that's hot for us Atlantic Canadians) because we simply had to have our picture at the Southernmost Point of the United States in Key West.

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□After reading about it in my Passporter guide and hearing all positive reviews, we did break my rulebook and took a 10-minute, \$5 per person taxi ride to Seven Mile Beach in Grand Cayman on our recent cruise. I'll talk about it in more detail in a future article on Grand Cayman excursion options, but this I can safely recommend. I still erred on the side of caution and insisted we start our journey back at least 90 minutes prior to all-ashore time. It did in fact take about an hour by the time we were back on the ship.

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□5. Tour in groups or with a buddy. Like anywhere, if something suspicious is going to happen, it's more likely to happen when you are alone and no one is watching. For the ports known to be extremely safe

(Key West and Grand Cayman, for example), you may be fine to go on your own. My mom hopped on a bus tour in Key West without a problem. In other areas such as Falmouth and Cozumel, it is truly inadvisable to go off the beaten path and especially not alone.

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□4. Just keep walking. Be prepared for vendors aggressively selling their wares, particularly in ports like Cozumel. They stand outside their stores and yell to you as you walk through the market, usually while you're trying to keep up with your tour group. Just look straight ahead, keep walking, and don't lose your group by being lured into a store!

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□3. Feel free to haggle, but leave your valuables in your cabin safe. If you do want to shop, read the precautions about the port you are visiting and have a plan. Don't carry large amounts of cash on you and keep any money close on your person, preferably around your neck under clothing.

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□2. Keep expectations of port adventures in check. You are paying a lot of money for most of the port adventures, so be sure the cost is truly worth it to you, even if it turns out to be not quite what you expected. Read the fine print. Also consider the ages and abilities of your party and whether, for example, paying over \$100 per person to swim (very briefly) with dolphins makes sense for you.

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□1. Feel free to stay onboard! Many repeat cruisers love watching the masses disembark on port days so they can enjoy several hours of uncrowded pools and other amenities onboard. I don't feel the need to book any tours, while my husband isn't interested in cruising unless it entails some new adventures in port.

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□We like to mix it up with family time together and apart. Everyone goes home happy and looking forward to the next Disney cruise! Bon Voyage!

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