

Itty Bitty Living Space on the High Seas: Disney Cruise Line Stateroom Review

by Lorelei Ketcherside, PassPorter Guest Contributor

So you're going on a family cruise! Hurray!

You've seen the promotional materials flaunting inside staterooms on the classic ships "up to twenty five percent larger than the cruise industry standard." This is Wonder-ful; until you realize that this makes a stateroom a smidgeon smaller than the average American dorm room. What's a family of four and their belongings for the week to do? Aside from just packing less, there are some tricks and tips that have helped me make my own "itty bitty living space" feel bigger on the inside.

First off, prepare your packing and luggage for small spaces. Don't worry, you can still bring your ball gowns and pirate night pantaloons. I'm talking organization today, not minimalist packing, although that certainly does help, too. If your party contains people who still need or like assistance finding all the parts to an outfit, or just people who can never match colors, this first tip is for you. I found that if I put entire outfits, in a gallon size or larger zip top baggie, not only did the outfits all stay together, but no one kept us waiting in the search for socks in the bottom of a drawer. Just stuff each bag with a complete outfit from tops to socks and underclothes and squeeze all of the air out before zipping shut. Toss them into a suitcase and you're good to go. The bags also make unpacking a snap. All your pirate's baggies get deposited into his allotted drawers and you're done. If you're a super planner, you can write the names and days on the outside of the bags to keep your crew color coordinated. One last bonus to baggies - the aforementioned ball gowns won't be able to shed glitter on everything that shares a suitcase with them. I'm as much of a fan of pixie dust as the next cruiser, but not in my socks.

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□ Another handy packing pointer - make sure to select the right luggage for the job; bags you can store under the bed. If you're setting to sea aboard the Disney Magic or Disney Wonder, you have nine inches of clearance to store suitcases under the bed. Dream class ships enjoy a little more wiggle room, with thirteen vertical inches to stow your belongings. I find it easiest to either choose to bring baggage that can slide easily underneath the beds, or else (on Magic class ships), bring a roommate who doesn't mind lifting the bed frame to slide them underneath to store (there's a bit of extra clearance once you get past the edge of the frame). Squishy-sided bags are another great

option. If you're stuck traveling with oversized luggage, you may be able to get your stateroom host to take the empty luggage off of your hands for a little while. However, be prepared to stow large baggage in your closet as more often than not, stateroom hosts simply do not have space to store personal belongings.

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□After you've arrived in your stateroom and have taken stock of things, it'll be time to start unpacking. We found that there was more than ample space and the room felt spacious, so long as everything stayed relatively put away. I know, it is vacation and the last thing anyone wants to do is clean. A little planning and unpacking keeps everything running smoothly and keeps the stateroom feeling calm rather than cramped. To keep your room shipshape, consider hanging everything that can hang, in the closet, to maximize the amount of available drawer space. The closets can hold a surprising amount of things hung up, and have two small shelves near the room safe as well. If you run short on hangers, the stateroom hosts keep some extras, available on request.

If you bagged the kiddie clothing by outfit, assigning each child a set of drawers to themselves keeps them organized almost without effort. I store the previous days' Navigators, photos, and other papers in the top desk drawer, and reserve the top dresser drawer closest to the door for odds and ends we pick up throughout the cruise, rather than leaving these to pile up on the dresser top.

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□If your stateroom has a steamer trunk-styled cabinet or storage in the coffee table, take advantage of the extra space to stow and tuck away things that aren't in frequent use, perhaps the spare pillows found in the over-TV cabinet, so you can free that up for more shelving space.

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□Where to store the shoes? With square footage ranging upward from 169 square feet, the last place they should stay is underfoot, so to speak. These can go on the closet floor of course, along with a handy mesh laundry bag or pop-up laundry hamper. Once the laundry bag fills, I run a load and fold it back into the luggage. If vacation means skipping laundry for a week, you can always shove the dirty laundry into a plastic bag. If you did the zip bags, the empties store the dirty or wet clothes and keep your luggage clean, to boot. Alternatively, your souvenirs from the gift shop came with bags too. Either way, bag the laundry up and it's back into the luggage.

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□One thing I always remember to bring is either strong magnets or a magnetic ribbon board for organizing tickets and such that you need to grab on your way out of the door. Aside from the entry door into your stateroom, the bathroom doors also take magnets nicely - that gives you lots of "pin-up" space right near the front door. Actually, we nearly left

our magnetic ribbon board behind on our last cruise because it blended with the room decor so well. Make sure to use only magnets on the surfaces in the rooms, as tape and other adhesives mar the doors and walls and can incur a re-painting fee; not the most pleasant souvenir.

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□Another indispensable tip: consider bringing an over-the-door shoe holder with clear or mesh pockets. The shoe holder saves your sanity and keeps sunscreen, bug spray, hair ties, and dinglehoppers neatly at hand. If the shoe hanger hangs on the inside of the bathroom door, then it's out of sight, out of the way and out of my hair. I take full advantage of the shelving in the split baths, borrowing one of our room's water tumblers to corral wayward toothbrushes.

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□Basically, I make myself at home with the in-room storage, but make sure everything is in a convenient and consistent location. About once a day, I give our stateroom a good once-over. Taking the time to stow away all the little things that seem to appear out of the woodwork helps keep a calm, peaceful environment. With just a little planning and organizing, rest and relaxation easily fit into even the smallest of staterooms.

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□Happy sailing, y'all!

About The Author: Lorelei is a Christian, wife, mother of two, vegan, Texan, bookworm, and terrible-though-enthusiastic photographer. She sunburns indoors on a cloudy day, but still looks forward to her next Disney Cruise in spring of 2013!

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