



*Try rock climb aboard, but only if physically fit*

Because of constant tight security, cruise ships are much safer than any other vacation venue, including hotels, amusement parks, beaches and mountain resorts. Everyone aboard, both crew and passengers, is registered and accounted for. There are no casual strangers aboard, as you'd find anywhere else on your travels.

However, despite all the protections, crimes and accidents do occur on cruise ships. Some tips from cruise experts and frequent sailors may help you have a safe trip on your next sailing.

1. Lifeboat drill: Almost as soon as you're aboard and getting settled in your cabin, the ship's alarm goes off and you're required to attend a lifeboat drill. Just because you feel safe on a big, modern cruise ship, don't take the drill lightly. Pay attention to the instructions and demonstrations by crew members, and be prepared for that emergency you believe may never happen.

2. Precautions: Wear comfortable, rubber-soled shoes whenever you'll be outside on deck. Even if there's no rain, the ocean humidity can make some deck areas of the ship slick. Also, if there's rough weather, the shoes can help you keep your balance.

3. Although cruise ships are spotlessly clean, many of them carry as many as 4,000 passengers and crew, all squeezed very close together for days. As a precaution against colds and flu, wash your hands with soap and hot water frequently.

4. Financial safety: Don't carry large sums of money on your cruise, especially if you'll be going ashore on excursions. Keep your cash and jewelry in your cabin safe or with the purser's lock-up. Use your regular credit card, or on many ships, you can get an on-board ID card. You can use it everywhere aboard, then pay out the totals with your regular credit card.

5. Never walk alone: If you enjoy a midnight stroll on deck, for your safety, never do it with at least one other person. Also, if you sign up for an excursion, once ashore in unfamiliar territory,

never wander off alone from the rest of the group. If you need to take a taxi or local bus, be sure there's at least one other ship's passenger with you.

6. Cabin security: Once inside, keep your door locked, and never open it unless you're absolutely sure of the person outside. Whenever you're away from your cabin, keep it locked. Your steward should be the only person who has access whenever you're not there.

7. Don't overdo it: One of the fun benefits of cruises is that you have total freedom to do whatever you want, day or night. One of the most popular is unlimited food in dining rooms, buffets, in-room dining and a dozen fast-food booths throughout the ship. And it's all included in that one price you paid for your trip. The rumors are true that many passengers come home from cruises carrying five or ten extra pounds.

If you don't want to gain weight, go easy on the amounts and types of food you eat. There are always plenty of attractive salads, fresh fruits, fish, chicken and other low-fat foods for the diet conscious. If you do overindulge, there are pools, spas and many other exercise facilities aboard to help work off the extra poundage.

8. Go easy on the booze. On most ships, liquor, wine and beer are not part of the all-inclusive price of your cruise. However, the festive atmosphere aboard may make it easy to overindulge, even when you have to pay for it. For your own health and safety, keep your booze intake to a manageable level.

9. In addition to the inclination to overdo your diet and drink while on a cruise, you may also be tempted to sign up for all kinds of exercise programs aboard. For example, many of the large cruise ships now have plastic mountains to simulate rock climbing. Unless you're in excellent physical condition, and young enough to handle the rough stuff, keep your onboard exercises to a safe level.

10. The same precaution applies to shore excursions. Read the instructions carefully and ask questions before you sign up. You should be fully aware of the physical requirements involving long walks, climbing stairs, small boating, in-water experiences and other activities.

Cruises can be great experiences, and they offer many ways to have fun. If you're always conscious of your personal safety while on your travels, your sea voyage can be even more enjoyable.