



Because of constant tight security, cruise ships are much safer than any other vacation venue. Everyone aboard, both crew and passengers, are registered and accounted for at all times. There are no casual strangers, as you'd find at beach resorts or city hotels.

However, despite all the protections, crimes and accidents do occur on cruise ships. Some tips from cruise experts and savvy senior sailors may help you have a safe trip on your next sea journey. 1. Lifeboat drill: Almost as soon as you're aboard and getting settled in your cabin, the ship's alarm may go off and you're required to attend a lifeboat drill. Although you feel safe on a big, modern cruise ship, don't take the drill lightly. Pay attention to instructions and demonstrations by crew members, and be prepared for that emergency you hope may never happen.

2. Precautions: Wear comfortable, rubber-soled shoes whenever 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.

Although cruise ships are spotlessly clean, many 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.

3. Financial safety: Don't carry large sums of money, especially if you go 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.

4. Never walk alone: If you enjoy a midnight stroll on deck, for your safety, be with a companion. 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, be sure there's at least one other ship's passenger with you.

5. 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 when you're not there.

6. Indulge: One of the fun benefits of cruises is that you have total freedom to do whatever you want, day or night. Food is available in dining areas, buffets, in-room service 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. If you do overindulge, there are pools, spas and many other exercise facilities aboard to help work off the extra poundage.

On most ships, liquor, wine and beer are not part of the inclusive price. However, the festive atmosphere aboard may make it easy to overindulge. For your own health and safety, keep your booze intake to a manageable level.

In addition to the inclination to overdo food and drink, you may also be tempted to sign up for exercise programs aboard. For example, many large cruise ships now have plastic mountains to simulate rock climbing. Unless you're in excellent physical condition, keep your onboard exercises to a level you can handle.

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 always conscious of your personal safety and physical limits, your sea voyage can be even more enjoyable.