
Geek Cruises Primer

1. Welcome!

A warm welcome to Geek Cruises! We appreciate the opportunity to host you on a growth- and education-oriented vacation. You are embarking on a memorable adventure. Our goal is to provide you with a positive cruise-conference experience unlike any you've had before. Geek Cruises would like to earn its place as your preferred vacation.

1.1 Cruising with Children and Family

Cruise lines welcome families with children. And children tend to adapt (immediately!) to life on board a cruise ship.

The cruise lines Geek Cruises uses offer supervised activities for children and teens. These activities group youngsters by age groups, and are conducted by youth counselors. In addition to special activities, your young family members can enjoy tours, games, movies, sports, and swimming with other kids and teens.

1.2 Cruising as a Single

You'll find that many Geek Cruisers are traveling solo, and you'll meet experienced Geek Cruisers who travel as singles.

Why? To begin with, cruising is an easy way to meet people. On a Geek Cruise, you are with a group of people with a strong interest in a common subject. Quickly and spontaneously, a community sense develops. To further encourage and build community, we do something special at dinner: each night we assign everyone new dinner companions by having people move to different tables. (As a group, we all do Second Seating for dinner and we all sit in the same area in the dining room.) By the third evening, or so, even those of us who are shy find ourselves engrossed in stimulating conversation with new acquaintances.

Many ships (though not all) have single cabins and special rates for single occupancy of a double stateroom. For those in our group traveling this way, we will find you a roommate to share a cabin — a "guaranteed share (GS)" — so you pay only the per person rate for double occupancy.

1.3 Who Takes a Geek Cruise?

Banish the thought of a typical cruise passenger — there is none! Singles, couples, families. All ages. All ethnic groups. All personalities. All walks of life. On any cruise, the one common factor you'll notice is a taste for adventure. On a Geek Cruise, you'll meet many people who share a special common interest.

2. Preparing for Your Geek Cruise

2.1 Identification — Mission Critical

Please check your travel documents carefully to ensure that you are traveling with the proper documents for your particular travel situation.

2.1.1 What Travel Documents and Identification Do I Need?

For most cruises, you simply need a passport, and a passport is the ideal form of identification when traveling between countries. Non-U.S. citizens boarding a ship in the U.S. will need a valid passport. In addition, non-U.S. citizens who have previously been admitted to the United States for permanent residence must carry their Permanent Resident Card (Form I-551), commonly known as a Green Card. Resident aliens not in possession of this must obtain one at the nearest office of the U.S. Immigration Service.

Americans can travel in Canada and some countries in the Caribbean (including Mexico) without carrying a passport — a driver's license (or other government-issued photo ID) and a certified (not simply "notarized" but *certified*) birth certificate will be acceptable. However, even though this is permissible, the ideal is to carry your passport.

A few cruises also require travel visas in addition to passports (See "Obtaining Any Necessary Visas" below).

2.1.2 Obtaining a Passport or Birth Certificate — U.S. Citizens

Plan on beginning the process to obtain a passport several months before your cruise. Every traveler, including children and infants, should have a passport.

The official U.S. government website for passport information is:

http://travel.state.gov/passport_services.html

You can apply for a passport at many post offices and federal, state and probate courts, and some libraries and county and municipal offices. Locate the “passport acceptance center” nearest you by searching at:

<http://iafdb.travel.state.gov/>

You can pick up a passport application at any of these centers, or you can download the passport application form applicable to you at:

http://travel.state.gov/get_forms.html

As a rule, to begin the process of obtaining a passport, you must present your passport application in person at a passport acceptance center.

If you need to have a U.S. passport renewed, you can obtain details about the renewal process at:

http://travel.state.gov/passport_renewal.html

2.1.3 Obtaining a Passport or Birth Certificate — Non U.S. Citizens

If you need a passport and you are not a U.S. citizen, please check with the appropriate government agencies within your country of citizenship.

2.1.4 Using Identification Other Than a Passport

If you are a U.S. citizen and you need a copy of your birth certificate, contact the city hall located in your city of birth. If you do bring a birth certificate and government-issued photo ID rather than a passport, the birth certificate must be a certified copy.

2.1.5 Obtaining Any Necessary Travel Visas

Some countries require that you obtain official authorization (called a visa), for a fee, before entering their country. You are responsible for obtaining any necessary visas. Many countries don't require that U.S. citizens have a travel visa; countries' visa requirements of non U.S. citizens vary.

As you research visa requirements in preparation for your trip, remember to check all the countries on your itinerary. You can read about visa requirements of specific countries at Zierer Visa Service (www.zvs.com, or call 866-788-1100 or 954-791-1530).

Non U.S. citizens should contact the nearest representative embassies or consulates for visa information; you can also contact Zierer's at

<http://www.zvs.com/site/Misc/nonuspassports.html>

or 866-788-1100 to initiate research on visa requirements for your country's citizens.

2.2 Do I Need Cash Onboard the Ship?

It's a good idea to bring some cash on your voyage. You may need cash for tipping and casino gambling on some cruise lines. However, 99% of your expenses will be paid for with a credit card. When you initially board the ship you will be required to provide a credit card for your onboard expenses.

2.3 Packing

2.3.1 Travel Documents

Approximately a month before your cruise, you will receive a packet containing your tickets, immigration forms, and luggage tags from Geek Cruises. You will need these items to board your ship.

2.3.2 Bath Supplies

Soap, shampoo, and body lotion are standard amenities in cruise ship cabins. Sometimes the cruise line provides “conditioning shampoo”; so if you prefer separate shampoo and conditioner, you may want to bring your own supply. All cabins provide a hairdryer adapted for shipboard use.

2.3.3 Clothes

Pack clothing for your cruise as if you were going to a resort. Over the course of your cruise, you will need clothing for shipboard activities, port excursions, and dinner.

Your travel documents will list the dress code for specific evenings. In addition, the daily onboard newsletter notes the dress code for the following night's dinner. Generally, on a seven-day cruise there are two formal nights, two informal nights, and three casual nights.

Experienced cruisers pack light, and mix and match.

Cruise ships are well air conditioned, so remember to bring a sweater or shawl for chilly corners.

Port calls involve excursions, walking, and shopping. In every case, your safest bet is casual, relatively conservative clothing — “when in Rome, do as the Romans do.” Shorts and tee shirts or polo shirts serve the purpose most places, and are compact to pack.

If you’re planning to tour places of worship on your port visit, it’s wise to wear clothing that covers the shoulders and knees. Otherwise, you may not be permitted to enter the building.

Whether you’re cruising in warm or cool climates, you’ll want to bring a bathing suit, sandals, and coverup so you can enjoy the ship’s swimming pools.

Bring a pair of walking shoes for strolling the deck and exploring ports.

When you pack for cool climates, like Alaska, think layers. Alaskan ports can be cool and damp, so pack an umbrella and rain gear. Many Alaska cruises feature a visit to a glacier. You may be outside on deck for a few hours to get a close look at the glacier, so bring lightweight, layerable clothing. Layers keep you warm, are versatile, and are much easier to transport than bulky winter clothing.

Evening attire on a cruise varies from night to night.

On formal nights, some people enjoy wearing tuxedos and evening gowns. If formal dressing is not your thing, not to worry. A dark suit, or jacket and tie, is perfectly acceptable. It’s not unusual to see men wearing kilts or other ethnic clothing. Women have as much latitude as men on Formal Night. At the formal dinners, you’ll see women in cocktail dresses; gowns and suits; as well as ethnic attire; vintage clothing; and striking, dressy separates.

If you don’t own a tuxedo and want to wear one on formal night, you can rent a tux on the ship.

Informal night calls for a sport jacket and slacks for men, and dressy dresses or tailored pants outfits for women.

Casual night means dressy sportswear — Dockers or khakis-type slacks and shirts with collars for men. Women can opt for sporty slacks outfits or simple dresses.

Every sort of attire is acceptable in the buffet, except swimwear.

(For the definitive take on packing for a cruise, read Linda Coffman’s advice at www.CruiseDiva.com. Linda covers womens’, mens’, and babies’ packing needs; dressing for warm climates, cool cruise climates; packing smart, and other valuable topics.)

If you don’t want to deal with dress codes, you can always have dinner in the buffet, or in casual dining venues the ship offers.

Some ships offer self-service laundries in addition to the ship’s laundry service. Travel irons are not permitted on most ships (a fire hazard) and so a laundromat is a convenience.

2.3.4 Geek Toys

Many of us travel with multiple electrical devices like digital and video cameras, laptops, PDAs, and cell phones whose batteries need to be charged. Most cabins have a maximum of one free electrical outlet so consider packing a small power strip — *without surge protection*.

Most ship cabins do not have an alarm clock (it must be some nautical tradition). So you may want to pack a travel alarm clock.

Binoculars are a great travel toy. Scanning the rugged shoreline, appreciating light houses, spotting wildlife — you’ll be glad you brought binoculars.

2.3.6 Have a “Plan B” for Your Luggage ...

Most luggage travels from your front door to your cabin without a hitch. You can take a few simple steps to optimize the chances for your luggage to arrive on time, intact, and ready for use.

But first, plan B. Pack the things you cannot live without in your carry-on luggage. Medications, travel and identification documents, jewelry, cameras and electronics, crucial toiletries, and versatile clothing. (On the subject of jewelry and other valuables — while we have *never* heard of anything being stolen from a cabin, each cabin does come with a vault to lock up your passport, jewelry, and cash.)

Occasionally luggage is misplaced or lost by airlines. If luggage does not materialize until after the ship leaves the pier, you may not get it until your next port stop. A well planned carry on can help you cope until your wandering luggage arrives.

- Luggage may be exposed to rain at the airport or pier, and routinely experiences “normal wear and tear”
- Place personal identification labels inside your bags, so if exterior tags are torn off, the airline can still match you with your bags
- Use waterproof pens to fill out luggage tags
- Pack a roll of colored duct tape — It can help identify, label, repair, and secure your luggage
- Use the ship’s luggage tags in addition to your permanent luggage tags. Some days, in some ports, several ships arrive and depart. Make it clear that your luggage belongs on or with a specific ship.

2.4 Individual Dietary Needs

Cruise lines are hip to dietary preferences. Generally, they can cover low-salt and low-fat diets, and provide sugar-free dessert options. You can always find vegetarian and low carbohydrate entrees on menus. Some cruise lines also can accommodate kosher, gluten-free, and other dietary needs. You must notify the cruise line at least two months in advance of your cruise to secure your diet request.

2.5 Celebrating Special Occasions

Birthdays, anniversaries, and other festivities all add to the fun of a cruise. You can arrange for cakes for celebration in the dining room, and can order champagne, flowers, and other treats to be delivered. Just like dietary requests, you need to make these arrangements well ahead of your sailing date. If you have a birthday on the cruise, Geek Cruises will pre-arrange for a birthday cake to be delivered to your table that evening for dessert.

2.6 Tobacco Use On Board

There is only one smoke-free cruise ship on the high seas — and Geek Cruises has yet to use this ship. If you are allergic to smoke, this is not a problem, however. Smoking is not permitted in the dining room, and the bars all have designated smoking areas. Since there’s always a breeze on a cruise ship any smoke that appears is instantly swept out to sea.

2.7 Seasickness

Most people are to some extent susceptible to motion sickness. Fortunately, given modern ship construction and cruise ship sailing routes, the wide majority of cruisers do

not have problems with motion sickness. If you don’t normally experience motion sickness, chances are you won’t have any such problems on a cruise.

While people nervously joke about it, there’s nothing funny about being inconvenienced by seasickness. With a little information, you can minimize your susceptibility, and effectively take care of symptoms that might arise.

2.7.1 Prevention

The cruise line has done much of the work of prevention.

- Cruise ships are large, and their hull is designed for a smooth ride
- Many ships have an egg-shaped extension on the bow (the front of the boat!) which slices through waves so the ship doesn’t rise and fall on waves
- Most ships have computer-controlled wings under the ship, called hydraulic stabilizers, that lessen the rolling of the ship. When the sea is calm (the usual case) the wings sit parallel to the body of the ship, and are still. When the sea is active, the crew deploys the stabilizers, which regulate the movement of the ship in the water.

If the ship is forecast to pass through a rough patch, plan your activities with an eye to motion sickness prevention:

- eat light meals
- avoid dairy products, salty foods, and meals high in protein and calories
- avoid alcohol
- minimize coffee intake
- get out into cool, fresh air
- avoid activities that involve visual stimulation (reading, watching TV)
- stay close to the center of the boat, on a deck near the waterline
- focus on a stable horizon or object
- if you feel uncomfortable, lie down

On rough days, the ship offers broth, breads, and other foods which are easy on the stomach.

2.7.2 Active Remedies and Prevention

There are both medicinal and nonmedicinal treatments for seasickness.

Acupressure wristbands are mildly effective, and have no known side effects.

If you are taking medications or nutritional supplements, when considering a medicinal treatment for motion sickness, check with your doctor or pharmacist.

Ginger is a traditional treatment for motion sickness. Ginger's effectiveness in motion sickness has been studied, and well-designed research shows it to be about as effective as antihistamine motion-sickness medications. The U.S. FDA includes ginger on its list of "Generally Regarded As Safe (GRAS)" substances. On the other hand, the safety of using ginger has not been established. Theoretically, ginger can interfere with the function of blood platelets, although this has not been proven in research studies. Nonetheless, if you take a blood thinner, consider using motion sickness remedies other than this herb.

Antihistamines such as Meclizine (brand name Bonine or Antivert), Dimenhydrinate (Brand name in U.S. Dramamine; Travel Tabs in Canada), cyclizine (brand name Marezine) are moderately effective for motion sickness, and are available over the counter. Most ships will provide doses of an antihistamine motion-sickness medicine if you ask at the Front Desk or in the Infirmary. Drowsiness is a common side effect of antihistamines.

Scopolamine (Transderm-Scop; "the Patch") is a prescription motion sickness medicine. It is a very effective treatment for motion sickness.

Scopolamine patches do have a number of downsides you should discuss with your doctor before deciding to use the patch on a cruise:

- people with liver, kidney, or bladder problems should be very cautious with the patch
- people with narrow-angle glaucoma can not use the patch
- virtually all users experience dry mouth and drowsiness; about a third have blurred vision

3. Your Geek Cruise

3.1 Arrival and Departure

Cruise ships are punctual. Boarding begins four to five hours before the scheduled departure. Plan your flight arrival accordingly, so that you have ample time to get to the port and through security. All passengers have to be onboard ship 30 minutes before the ship sails away.

It's a good idea to schedule your return flight at least six hours after the ship is scheduled to dock. The ship has to dock, and crew and passengers must clear customs before disembarking.

Midway through the cruise, the ship staff will ask you to fill out information about your disembarkation plans, including your means of transportation and flight times. They use this information, among other purposes, to assign you a time in the disembarkation sequence, and to assign you color-coded luggage tags. The time and luggage tag assignment is designed to make certain that your luggage is ashore when you disembark, so you can claim your luggage and make your flight or train trip.

If you book your flight through the cruise line, a cruise line representative will meet you at the airport, usually in baggage claim. The representative will provide transportation from the airport to the pier.

If you book your own flight, you are responsible for getting from the airport to the pier. Your cruise ticket will indicate your ship's pier name. If you would like, Geek Cruises can arrange for transfers to and from the ship.

3.2 Your Cabin

Cruise ship cabins are small, but offer the comforts of home. All cabins have bathrooms, air conditioning/heating controls, ample closet space, closed circuit TV, a music channel, a safe, a hairdryer, and usually a love seat, and desk. Most cabins have twin beds, which the stewards can move together to make into a queen-sized bed. Some rooms have a wall-hung berth for a third person; some have loveseat sofas.

The beds have space underneath to stow your suitcases.

You will have a specific steward assigned to you during your stay. Stewards clean your room, deliver daily ship's communications, and are a great source of information and service.

3.3 Dining, Eating, Snacking, Nibbling ...

Cruise ship food is legendary. Given the high quality, variety, and presentation it's easy to indulge. You'll quickly understand why cruisers are rumored to gain a pound a day. You don't need to gain weight, though — you can always select from the low-cal, spa, heart-healthy, and sugar-free options on the menu, and at the buffet.

Some drinks are free on cruise ships — typically coffee, tea (hot and iced), lemonade, juice, and milk. Other drinks, both carbonated and alcoholic, have a charge associated with them.

3.3.1 The Main Dining Room

You will be assigned a table (and seating time) for the main dining room. Typically, breakfast and lunch are open seating — you sit at the same table but have a two-hour window in which to arrive. Dinner seatings are either early (around 6 pm) or late (8:15 pm). Geek Cruises likes to take second seating for dinner. This means that dinner starts at 8:15 pm. This may sound quite late, but in reality, it isn't. Geek Cruises offers many events from 6 pm to 7:30 pm and many Geek Cruisers, after dinner, either then go to the Las Vegas-style shows or go to one of the many bars on board. In Alaska, the sun is still out when you sit down to dinner!

You will have the same waiter and assistant waiter all week. You will be seated with other Geek Cruisers.

In the main dining room, you will have a menu of several entrees (there is always a vegetarian choice), as well as appetizers, drinks, and desserts.

3.3.2 The Buffet

If you decide the main dining room is too formal, or you want a quicker turnaround, or you miss your assigned seating time, the buffet is the place to go. On most ships, the buffet is one deck down from the top deck of the ship and offers excellent views. On some ships, the buffet items may be identical to those offered in the main dining room.

3.3.3 Room Service

Room service is available, free of charge, 24 hours a day.

3.3.4 Other Dining Venues

Ships often offer informal mid-day fare outside on the pool deck, such as burgers or tacos.

Practically all ships also have a small, private restaurant for "that special dinner." Typically there's a \$20 per person charge for this dinner. The food and service in these restaurants are always *excellent*, and the experience is well worth the extra fee. Reservations are required and these restaurants typically sell out, so it's best to make a reservation early in the cruise.

3.4 A Typical Day at Sea

At-sea time is used for conference sessions. If we are at sea all day we will have both morning and afternoon sessions. We break for an hour-and-a-half for lunch.

No classes are scheduled when we are in port. You can participate in shore excursions and explore each port to the max!

3.5 Shipboard Activities

Outside of class time for conference attendees, life on board ship is as active or mellow as you like. You have plenty of room to roam about and relax. Explore the ship or lounge by the pool. Read on deck, enjoying sea air. You can take exercise classes, tune up your dancing repertoire, play tennis or basketball, watch for sea creatures, or nap. Sign up for ping-pong tournaments. Visit the ship's library. Join the morning fitness walk on the promenade deck. See a feature film or attend an enrichment lecture about ports, wildlife, and culture. Play cards. Visit the Internet Café. Play bingo. Relax in a cozy corner. Visit the ice cream bar ... just this once ...

3.5.1 Mandatory Lifeboat Drill

The lifeboat drill is the only truly mandatory activity on the ship. If you do not show up for the lifeboat drill, the staff will track you down. According to international maritime law, the ship cannot not leave port until everyone has attended the lifeboat drill.

- There is a life jacket for each person in the cabin in your cabin closet
- There will be two drill announcements over the Public Address system instructing everyone to return to their cabins and don life jackets
- An alarm sounds and you walk to your "muster station" (a specific labeled location on deck) wearing your life jacket
- Your muster station is indicated on the inside of your cabin door, and on your life jacket

- Crew members at each stairway direct traffic
- When everyone arrives at their appointed muster stations a crew member will take attendance, explain the life jackets features, and tell you about the ship's alarm signals
- There is a brief announcement about the lifeboats' features and how to board your lifeboat
- The ship's officers inspect the assembled passengers
- The drill concludes (about 10 minutes from start to end); return the life jackets to your cabin closet

3.5.2 The Fitness Center and SPA

The fitness center is open all day. Facilities vary by ship. The usual offering includes treadmills, stair climbers, and various exercise equipment, aerobics classes, steam and sauna rooms, and dressing rooms.

The fitness center is typically located by the spa, where you can purchase facials, manicures and pedicures, hairstyling, and massages. It's wise to schedule spa services in advance, at the very beginning of the cruise, as these luxuries are in high demand.

3.5.3 Night Life

The ship is a vibrant scene at night. Live entertainment in the theater, dancing, movies, nightclubs, and casino action keep cruise fun going.

You can also find quiet corners in the public areas, stroll in the evening air, or borrow movies at the front desk.

3.6 Days in Port

When the ship reaches port — time to indulge! There are no conference sessions while we are in port, so your agenda is open.

If you have signed up for a shore excursion through the ship, you will have a ticket that announces when and where to meet. The cruise staff will call you to your designated meeting place. Double check that you have both your identification and your ship boarding card with you — you will have to show your I.D. and have your boarding card/room key scanned to leave or rejoin the ship.

In most cases, the ship is docked at the waterfront in port. In this case, you can enter and leave the ship at your convenience. In some ports of call, we anchor off shore, and take a "tender" (a lifeboat, basically) into port. Tenders run continuously until a designated time shortly before the ship sails.

And the ship does sail — promptly. It is critical to be back on the ship at the appointed time.

3.6.1 Shore Excursions

Cruise lines offer excursions, for a fee, to showcase the highlights and special features of each port.

Some people like to explore ports independently, and in most ports it is possible to do so. Some people like to shop for excursions once they arrive at the pier, and engage local tour providers directly, at a lower price than you find through the cruise line.

Two important reasons make booking excursions through the cruise line very sensible:

1. The cruise line scrutinizes excursions and their providers, and selects vendors of proven quality and reputation.
2. If you are on an excursion purchased through the cruise line, and the excursion returns late, the ship waits for the group. If you explore on your own, or engage a private tour provider, independent of the cruise line, and run late the ship sails without you.

3.6.2 Do Something ...

Port calls offer new experiences, adventure, and a chance to sample out-of-the-ordinary sights, sounds, and flavors. The siren song of new locales and experiences draws many people to cruising, so take a stroll, explore the town, book an excursion — go for it!

3.6.3 Shopping

All ports offer shopping. Cruise lines offer lectures detailing what items specific ports are known for, and which shops meet with their approval. Prior to each port call, the ship distributes simple maps of the port's shopping district, with the recommended shops marked. Keep track of your receipts — you will need them when you fill out the Customs form on the last day.

3.7 Connectivity

3.7.1 The Internet

Each ship's Internet Center offers computers with Internet access and printers. In addition, 802.11b wireless "hot spots" are available on all ships for guests traveling with personal laptop computers with wireless capability. You buy Internet access by the minute.

3.7.2 Phone

When you receive your cruise packet, it will contain information about how to contact the ship via phone.

Each cabin on the ship has a phone, which can be used to make calls to anywhere in the world. This phone connectivity is in the \$10 per minute range. Sometime in 2005 we expect the cruise lines to offer phone-over-IP, using your own cell phones. These phone calls should cost under \$2 a minute.

3.8 Medical Services on Board

The cruise ships Geek Cruises uses have extensive medical facilities on board. The ship Infirmaries are staffed by a physician and nurses, and a dentist is usually available. The ship is well equipped to handle most emergencies as well as more routine care. If the diagnostic tests or medical care you require cannot be done on board, patients are transferred to medical facilities on shore.

A fee for any medical services and medications you use through the infirmary will be added to your shipboard account. Medicare and many health insurances do not cover medical care on board, or in foreign countries. It is an excellent idea to check your insurance or Medicare coverage prior to cruise travel, and purchase travel medical insurance as necessary.

3.9 Laundry

Holland America, Cunard, and Costa ships offer full laundry and dry cleaning service on all their ships; laundry bags and price lists are in your cabin closet.

Carnival and Cunard provide self-service coin-operated washers and dryers, and irons in laundry rooms on all their ships. Holland America provides self-service washers, dryers, and irons on all its ships except ms Zuiderdam, ms Westerdam, and ms Oosterdam.

3.10 Tipping

Cruise lines add a baseline gratuity of US\$8–10 dollars a day to your fare. You can assume that there is a 15% tip built into beverage charges. If you have receive excellent service, you are always free to provide an additional cash tip at the time of service. Questions about tipping are handled by the Front Office on board ship.