



Postcard Perfect Journeys

The Ultimate *Cruise Savings* Guide

THE CHECKLIST I WORK THROUGH BEFORE I BOOK A CRUISE

★ 23 THINGS TO CHECK OFF BEFORE YOU SAIL ★

Hi, I'm **Karri of Postcard Perfect Journeys**, a travel advisor and lifelong cruise lover. This checklist holds the money-saving tips I use on my own cruises and share with my travelers. Work through each section before you book, before you sail, and onboard. 🌊



SECTION 01

Book Smarter, Save Instantly



Book early. The best cabins and early-bird fares go first

Popular seasonal sailings, like the Christmas markets, can sell out more than a year ahead

Big one



Use a travel advisor. Many advisors, including me, cost you nothing to use. I watch my clients' fares and rebook when a better rate appears

I do not charge a planning fee. Advisors often have access to group rates and perks that are not published.

Big one



Re-check your cruise's price midweek. I have caught more than one drop on a Tuesday

Set a Google alert for your cruise sailing to track price changes

Pro tip



Sign up for the cruise line's loyalty program BEFORE booking, even as a new member

Some lines give onboard credit just for being a loyalty member at booking

Easy win



Ask for a price match if the fare drops before your final payment date

Big one

 POSTCARD PERFECT TIP

It is worth checking whether a travel advisor can beat the cruise line's own website before you book direct. I have sometimes been able to add extras like prepaid gratuities or onboard credit that were not part of the public offer.



SECTION 02

Slash Onboard Spending

- ☐ Pre-purchase drink packages BEFORE boarding; they are usually cheaper online Easy win
Onboard prices are usually higher than the pre-cruise sale price
- ☐ Pre-pay gratuities before sailing to lock in the current rate Easy win
Cruise lines raise gratuity rates regularly, and prepaying protects you from increases
- ☐ Bring a refillable water bottle to avoid bottled water charges that add up daily Easy win
Fill up at the free drink stations; most ships have filtered water fountains
- ☐ Set a daily spending limit on your onboard account to avoid checkout shock Must do
Go to Guest Services on Day 1 and ask them to alert you when you hit your limit
- ☐ Skip the ship's spa and book port-side treatments, which usually cost less Worth doing
In the Caribbean, local treatments usually cost a fraction of the onboard price



SECTION 03

Score Free & Cheap Upgrades

- ☐ Call the cruise line 48–72 hours before departure and ask for "upsell rates" Big one
I ask for the "upsell rate" rather than an upgrade. That is the wording that has worked for me
- ☐ Check in online at exactly midnight on your check-in open date for best cabin picks Pro tip
Suites and balconies often open up when other passengers cancel last-minute
- ☐ Book a "guarantee" cabin category for lower prices, and you may be upgraded automatically Worth doing
The cruise line assigns your cabin and often bumps guarantee bookings to better rooms

- ☐ Mention special occasions at check-in; birthdays and anniversaries sometimes trigger free upgrades

Free!

Worth asking at the pier. The worst they can say is no

 UPGRADE SECRET

I have had better luck calling later in the day on a weekday than first thing in the morning. Worth a try if the first answer is no.



SECTION 04

Shore Excursion Savings

- ☐ Compare independent local tour operators with the ship's excursion prices before you buy

Worth doing

Read recent reviews from other cruise passengers before you book an independent operator

- ☐ Split excursion costs by forming groups with fellow passengers before sailing

Easy win

Other passengers on your sailing often organize shared tours; ask me how to find your sailing's group

- ☐ Walk off the ship and explore independently at non-tender ports. It's free

Free!

Research the port area in advance so you know exactly where to go and what's nearby

- ☐ Only book ship excursions for tender ports or places with safety concerns

Smart rule

Tender ports require a boat to shore, and ship excursions get priority tender access



SECTION 05

Hidden Fees to Watch For

- ☐ Turn off international roaming BEFORE boarding; use ship Wi-Fi or wait for port

Watch out

A single day of accidental international roaming can cost a great deal in phone charges

- ☐ Read your onboard account every single day and dispute errors immediately at Guest Services

Must do

Billing errors happen. Catching them daily is far easier than disputing at checkout

- ☐ Check if specialty dining has a "cover charge" vs. full à la carte pricing before you sit down

Watch out

Some ships charge a cover AND charge per item, so read the menu before ordering

- ☐ Confirm what your drink package actually covers before you board

Watch out

Most packages exclude premium spirits, specialty coffee, bottled water, and fresh-squeezed juice

- ☐ Check your cruise line's payment and settlement policies before the last night

Watch out

Payment methods, holds, and any card fees vary by cruise line, and a two-minute check avoids checkout surprises

 FINAL BOARDING TIP

On the last night, visit Guest Services after 9pm to review and settle your account. Lines are shortest then, and you can dispute anything calmly before the morning rush.

 Your Checklist Progress

BOOK SMARTER

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ONBOARD SPENDING

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UPGRADES

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EXCURSIONS

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HIDDEN FEES

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 COMPLETE

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TRIPS WORTH WRITING HOME ABOUT

Rather skip the homework? That's my job, and working with me costs you nothing extra. Book your next cruise with me and unlock **exclusive onboard spending money**. Booking a vacation package? Ask about my **Welcome Home Client Reward Program**. 

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