

What to Pack for a Cruise: Ultimate Packing List

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You're all booked and ready to set sail, having meticulously planned your shore excursions, sea days, specialty dining experiences and numerous events. However, the packing process lies ahead, leaving you wondering what essentials to bring.

It's common to fall into the trap of overpacking, assuming you'll need an outfit for every possible occasion. However, the reality is that many items can serve multiple purposes, effortlessly transitioning from day to night and vice versa.

Here's a cruise packing list to the rescue.

What to pack for a cruise: A checklist

Necessities:

- Swimsuit.
- Socks and underwear.
- Footwear.
- Pajamas.
- Clothing.
- Cell phone and chargers.
- Plug adaptors.
- Passport (unless you're cruising somewhere that doesn't require a passport).
- Emergency contact information.
- Medications and toiletries.

And don't forget your self-care items. You don't want to pay the high prices in a ship's store for basics you forget, so make yourself a checklist with the toiletry basics you may need like:

- Toothbrush and toothpaste.
- Glasses, contact lenses and solutions.

- Over-the-counter medicines like painkillers, stomach remedies, motion sickness medicine, etc.
- Any prescription medications, preferably in the original bottles.
- Makeup.
- Sunscreen and after-sun lotion (like aloe vera gel) to protect you from the rays and ease the sting if you get too much.
- Deodorant or body spray.
- Shampoo and conditioner if you're particular about what brands you use and hair products for styling.
- Feminine care products.
- Shaving supplies.
- Insect repellent, especially for shore excursions in tropical climates.
- Hand sanitizer and wipes.
- A small first aid kit.

Most cruise lines have blow dryers in each cabin, so you don't have to bring those. You can also bring curling irons and hair straighteners, as most cruise lines allow them onboard.

Nerdy Tip

Cruise cabins are small, so don't plan to live out of your suitcase. After you unpack, most of the beds in cruise cabins have space underneath for you to store your empty luggage.

Don't worry too much about having enough of everything (like underwear or socks) for every day of your cruise. You can always wash or dry-clean items if you want or need to wear them again.

Some cruise lines have self-service guest laundry onboard while others do not. You can send out your laundry using the ship's laundry service or wash out items in your cabin sink.

Clothing for onboard the ship

The next thing to do is to look at your cruise itinerary. Take note of the places you're going and the number of sea days.

You'll want to make sure you have the appropriate clothing for where you will be and what you will be doing.

Clothing for sea days

On days when the ship doesn't dock, you'll want to be casual and comfortable. That might mean athleisure or whatever you'd wear around your house when you're relaxing.

For warm weather itineraries, it's a good idea to bring two bathing suits so you can alternate them if one is not quite dry — and don't forget flip-flops or pool shoes.

You might also want a light sweater, sweatshirt or wrap. Sometimes the air conditioning is cranked up and it can get a bit chilly inside the ship or out on the ship deck at night.

Clothing for evenings

Attire for the evening depends on what cruise line you're on and what day it is.

For example, Royal Caribbean has the nights broken down into three categories: casual, smart casual and formal.

- Casual: This means jeans, shorts (but not in the dining room for dinner), sundresses, etc.
- Smart casual: A bit dressier, like something you'd wear to a nice restaurant at home.
- Formal: Time to get gussied up in cocktail dresses or suits. The number of formal nights depends on the length of a cruise. But don't worry if you don't want to pack something formal. You can still go to dinner in something a bit more casual. You can also wear the same outfit multiple times.

Other cruise lines have similar dress codes but call them different things. Carnival Cruise Line uses terms like "Cruise Casual" and "Cruise Elegant." Celebrity Cruises, meanwhile, calls for "Smart Casual" and "Evening Chic" attire.

The main point is you will probably want something a bit nicer to change into for dinner. You'll know what clothing to wear for each night because there will be an announcement in the printed daily newsletter you'll get in your cabin.

Nerdy Tip

The dressier nights are usually on sea days or days when the ship leaves port early.

Shoes

For footwear, consider packing a pair of water-resistant sandals or flip-flops for poolside and wet areas. You'll also need comfortable walking shoes for shore excursions, as well as a pair of versatile shoes that can be worn both around the ship and for more formal evening events.

Remember that the ship is in motion and may sway, so it's best to avoid high heels for safety and comfort.

Clothing for theme nights

When packing, you might want to take something for theme nights. For example, Norwegian Cruise Line hosts a "White Hot Party" where guests are encouraged to wear the color white. MSC Cruises has a variety of theme nights including White Party, Elegant Night, Flower Party and more.

Nerdy Tip

Look at a map of where you're going to help plan your attire. For example, Buenos Aires and Ushuaia are both in Argentina, but Ushuaia is about 2,000 miles south and has a completely different climate. You'll likely be very cold if you show up in Ushuaia in shorts.

What to pack for shore excursions

If you're planning to get off the ship in port, you'll need to make sure you have what you need for a day on land.

There are several essentials you may consider packing for your leisure time away from the ship.

- A small backpack or daypack.
- A refillable water bottle.
- A jacket or windbreaker.
- Something to cover your head, shoulders or legs with if the excursion includes a place where modest dress is required, like churches, mosques, temples or other historic sites. A scarf or pashmina works well for this.
- A hat or visor to keep the sun off your face.
- Required IDs, so you can get back on the ship.

For most excursions, comfortable clothing and walking shoes are the norm. Layers can be great so as the day warms up or cools down, you'll be dressed appropriately.

Pack the appropriate clothes for the excursions you've signed up for. If you'll be hiking, athletic wear will be crucial. For those visiting historic or religious sites, casual, modest clothing will be expected. If your goal is to beach bum, pack your swimsuit and goggles.

Nerdy Tip

Some countries limit camouflage print clothing to military members only. Check if that pattern is allowed in your destination ports before packing anything camo.

What else to pack for a cruise?

Electronics

You'll want your cell phone so you can use the cruise line's app and snap vacation photos. Don't forget a charging cord and a portable charger you can take with you on shore excursions.

And while your phone has a clock and alarm on it, it's a good idea to bring a portable alarm clock and a watch that is not connected to your phone. You might cross time zones during your cruise and need to adjust to the ship's time manually and override your phone.

Nerdy Tip

Cruise cabins often have a limited number of electrical outlets, and these outlets may not always conform to American standards in terms of shape and voltage. It's recommended to pack an adapter designed for European plugs, even if your cruise departs from the United States. This adapter will allow you to connect devices that support dual voltage, ensuring you have access to power for your electronic devices throughout your journey.

A small bag

Also, bring a small purse or bag to carry essentials around the ship, like your ship card, sunglasses and phone.

Kids items

Don't forget anything kids might need like diapers, strollers, toys, games and clothing.

Other incidentals

Some other items you might want:

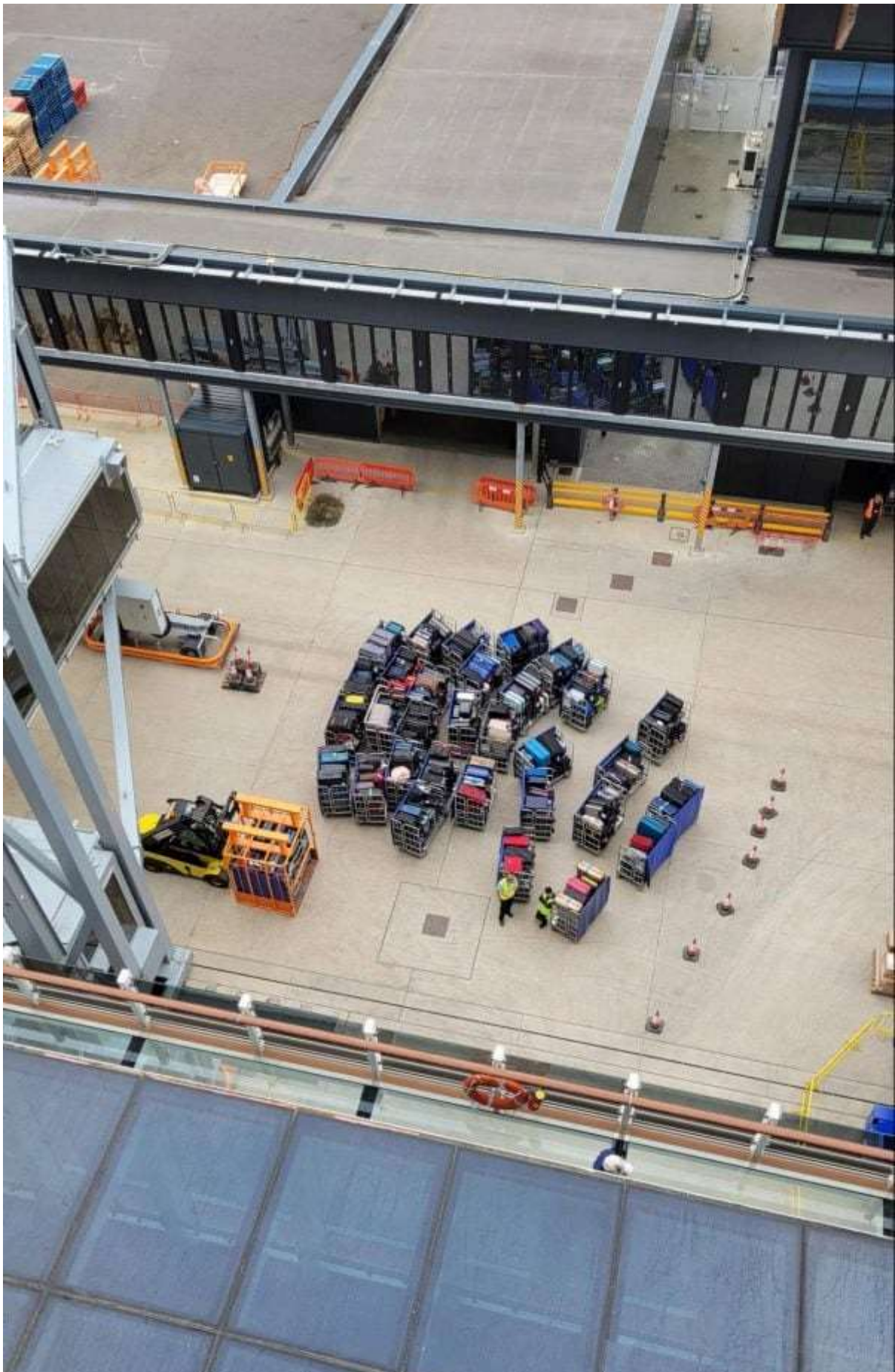
- A refillable water bottle.
- Zipper bags to keep things dry and organized.
- A Bluetooth speaker to bring some tunes into your cabin.
- Reading materials for time at the pool, on the balcony or in a comfy chair.
- A nightlight for the bathroom at night. The light switch for most bathrooms is outside the door so when you turn it on, it can flood the cabin with light and wake your cabin mate.
- An air freshener in case the cabin smells a bit stale.
- Post-it notes and a highlighter. You can write a note to your cabin mate or cabin steward on a post-it. The highlighter is to highlight all the fun things you want to do in the daily newsletter.
- Many cabin doors are magnetic, so pack a magnet and something to hang to help you identify your room in the long hallway of cabins.

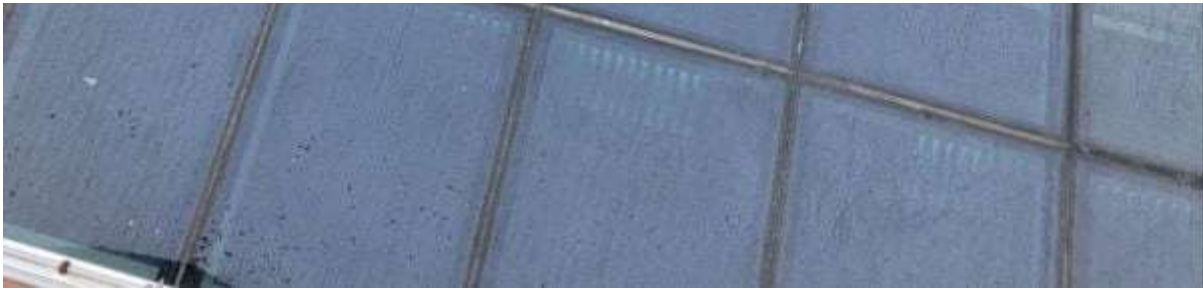
Nerdy Tip

The interior walls of cruise ships are magnetic, so a few magnetic hooks can create a space to store a hat, sleepwear, jacket or other lightweight objects. Magnets are also helpful to keep the printed daily schedule or other reminders where you can see them.

Where to pack what

When you board a ship, you'll turn your big suitcase over to a porter when you arrive at the pier. The luggage will go into bins and will go onboard separately from you. It will arrive at your cabin sometime later.





Luggage waiting to come onboard the Norwegian Prima (Photo by Tiffani Sherman)

So, make sure you bring things you might want for the day or need for the trip in your carry-on, which will board with you.

This includes medications, laptops, eyeglasses and any valuables. The other stuff can go in your larger suitcase.

Nerdy Tip

Make sure your passport, any necessary visas, cruise pass (the stuff you print after you check in online) and the credit card you want to use for your onboard account are with you and NOT in the suitcase you give to the porters.

Bookmark this packing list for a cruise

If you're worried about how to pack for a cruise, don't be. It's just like packing for any other vacation. Making a packing list can help so you don't forget things like toothpaste, which would be expensive to buy onboard.

You'll need clothing to wear during the day, both on the ship for sea days and off the ship on shore excursions. For those excursions, you'll want a day pack with a few essentials in it like water, sunscreen, a portable phone charger and anything else you might want.

For evenings, check with your cruise line to see if there are more formal evenings or if everything is nice casual. For many ships, think of what you might wear out to a nice restaurant at home. That would be appropriate for an evening onboard.

Overall, don't worry about wearing things more than once. Everyone else will probably be doing it also.

How to maximize your rewards
