

30 Days Prior

- 1. Get to know your ship**

Read reviews, peruse passenger chat boards, see what people are saying on social media sites, and look at the deck plans on the cruise line's website. The idea is to step onboard knowing the lay of the land. You may even be able to communicate with people who will be on your sailing via social media sites.
- 2. Pick your seats.**

If you booked an air/sea package through the cruise line, you should have your flight information by now. Go online and get seat assignments — or see if you can get better seats than the ones assigned. Also review the airline's baggage rules.
- 3. Make any special requests.**

If you have an allergy, a particular diet, or another special need, make sure the cruise line has that information. We recently read of someone who called room service on a Carnival Cruise Lines ship and requested 20 bananas for a special diet. This is the type of thing the lines like to prepare for in advance.
- 4. Check your paperwork.**

Review all of your cruise documents to make sure your name is spelled correctly and that it exactly matches what's on your ID; if it's wrong, alert your travel agent or the cruise line immediately. Check that your birth date is correct, too.
- 5. Decide what you want to see.**

If you aren't doing organized shore excursions, start researching ideas of what to do in ports — including looking at transportation options. Wandering around aimlessly is not recommended. If you have your heart set on a meal at a "hot" island restaurant, book it now.

21 Days Prior

- 6. Plan a budget.**

Don't forget to allow for souvenirs and gratuities for the crew (the suggested amount is listed on the cruise line website). Also, determine how much cash you'll want to have on hand.
- 7. Get out your luggage.**

When's the last time you used your suitcase? If it's been a while, pull it out of the attic or cellar and check the condition. If you see tears, either get a new suitcase — soft-sided is easiest to tuck away under cruise ship beds — or plan on packing duct tape.
- 8. Peruse your wardrobe.**

You will find packing suggestions at the cruise line website. Search online for photos of your ship to see what people wear. Check Pinterest and other websites to see what's in style, and plan a precruise shopping excursion — don't forget comfortable shoes!
- 9. Make a list of your medications.**

Ensure your prescriptions are updated and that you'll have a sufficient supply to pack for the duration of your trip. While you're at the drugstore, stock up on sunscreen.
- 10. Plan ahead for photos.**

Make an appointment for a precruise haircut and pedicure or beard trim, so you feel confident you look your best in pictures.

14 Days Prior

- 11. Locate your passport.** You don't want to have a mad last-minute scramble, so make sure your passport is in a place you'll remember.
- 12. Complete and print any important paperwork.** First, make sure you have a good supply of printer ink — you'll need it so you can print out any required boarding documents or other information about your cruise. While you're at it, complete any required paperwork online or in the packet from your travel agent.
- 13. Make arrangements for those left behind.** Check in with the dog sitter or kennel or babysitter or house sitter, where applicable, to make sure they have the correct dates for your vacation.
- 14. Have your mail held.** Go online and set the dates for the post office to hold your mail. Check in with your newspaper delivery service too.
- 15. Start gathering key items.** Choose a place in your house — a box, bed, dresser-top or corner — as a collection site for cruise items, such as your camera and extra batteries. When you have an idea of, "Oh, I need to take that..." you'll know exactly where to put it.
- 16. Track the weather.** Check the forecast for your day of departure, embarkation destination, and ports on weather.com, so you can pack accordingly.
- 17. Decide which credit card you'll bring with you.** If you're planning to use your credit card, consider contacting the company to advise the staff of the countries you'll be visiting. You don't want your card flagged as a security risk because you're in Florida one day and Nassau the next.

One Week Prior

- 18. Gather your passwords.** Make a list of online passwords you'll want on hand during your cruise. It's frustrating when you're on a ship and want to write a Facebook or Twitter post but can't remember how to log on.
- 19. Review your packing checklist.** Eliminate stuff in your pile you don't really need to take. Test what will fit in your suitcase.
- 20. Finalize plans for getting to the airport.** Call a car service if necessary, and recheck flight times.

Day of Departure

- 21. Double-check everything on your way out.** Throw the last items in your suitcase and make sure you have everything you need in your carry-on: documents, credit cards, cash, meds. Set your "out of office" notice on your email. Don't forget to water the plants, adjust the thermostat, and lock the door.