

Boats/Cruise Safety Tips

Before Boarding

- Get the immunizations you need and any preventive medicine for illnesses such as malaria.
- Refill your medications and keep them in your carry-on luggage.
- Plan for medical emergencies by preparing a traveler's medicine kit and checking if your health insurance covers medical emergencies abroad.
- Ask if there is a ship physician who is prepared to treat a variety of illnesses and injuries, including many life-threatening conditions.

All Aboard

- While you are on a cruise, wash your hands often—before and after meals and activities (such as sports, games, casino, pool, exercise), after using the restroom or caring for a sick person.
- When you are in foreign ports, drink water and eat foods only from sources you know are safe. Avoid drinking tap water, even in ice cubes. Instead, drink bottled water. Avoid raw or uncooked foods. Only eat fruit you have peeled yourself. Due to the high sanitation standards of the cruise industry, food and water provided aboard ship is typically safe to eat and drink.
- Protect yourself from insect bites with insect repellent and by wearing pants and long sleeves outdoors when mosquitoes are most active.
- Keep your shoes on outside. When you're walking on the beach, wear sandals or thongs to prevent infection from microorganisms, insects, and worms.
- Be aware of where you swim. Hazardous marine life, bacteria, viruses and parasites may dwell in seawater as well as freshwater streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds.

Back Home

When you get home, be sure to contact your doctor if you have any unexplained symptoms within a couple of weeks or months of your trip. Describe the areas where you've been. Make sure you finish all the medications that were prescribed for you.



Some things to consider:

- Make copies of your passport, driver's license, and credit cards before leaving home. Leave the copies in a safe place on your ship. If the ship's purser holds your passport (which is often the case, to expedite clearing the ship in foreign ports), carry the passport copy ashore with you.
- Use an under-the-clothing style money pouch. Non security style waist packs and handbags are prime targets for cut and run thieves (who cut the strap and disappear into the crowd).
- Don't carry valuables in your waist pack, but do thread the strap through your belt loops. Carry a handbag with a shoulder strap across your body and keep it in front of you.
- The handsome local offering to exchange your dollars at a better than market rate is probably a hustler.
- Wearing expensive jewelry and flashing a wad of money is an invitation to pickpockets.
- Men should carry wallets in their front pockets and divide their money, keeping a little in each pocket. In fact, why carry a wallet in your pocket at all if you don't have to? Preferable is a wallet that attaches to your belt and tucks inside your slacks.

Cruise Ship Security

Cruise ships are like a small city where passengers are encouraged to forget their troubles and relax once onboard ship. It is natural for passengers on vacation to let their guard down, especially when out to sea in a resort-like setting. My advice: Don't let a false sense of security aboard a cruise ruin your vacation by becoming a crime victim. Before you ship out, take these preventative steps:

Beware of Your Luggage

Most complaints regarding theft, damage or loss involves the contents of luggage. Savvy travelers will make a written inventory of items in their luggage and photograph it in case of loss. Carry important items like medication, eyeglasses, and expensive jewelry in your hand luggage. Photocopy the contents of your wallet and your passport. Carry a copy in your hand luggage and leave one at home as back up. A word to the wise, travel with sturdy plain-looking luggage. Expensive looking luggage may be targeted for its perceived contents. External bag tags should not list your full home address and telephone number. If they do, sophisticated home burglars will know that you are on a cruise and not be home soon.

Use durable luggage that is capable of being locked or secured and that will withstand being at the bottom of a pile of hundreds of other pieces of luggage without popping open. It is a good idea to add extra banding or airport plastic wrap or duct tape to your luggage locks to prevent anyone from opening your luggage without detection. Self-locking plastic tie-wraps work well for securing zippers on soft-sided luggage. You can buy these at any home improvement store for about a dollar. The reason for this is that smugglers have been known to slip drugs into luggage only to retrieve it later and maybe with force. Passengers have unknowingly transported cocaine that was slipped into their suitcase by baggage handlers only to be arrested later by port authorities. What explanation you would give to prove your innocence to a foreign government of why you are carrying drugs? If your luggage was properly sealed, you should see if it has been tampered with prior to opening it. Report any luggage tampering immediately to ship security before opening the case. Be sure to repack just as securely before you disembark and take similar precautions.

Cabin Security

After you enter your cabin, and while the door is still open, always check inside the bathroom or closet before sitting down inside. Don't assume that your cabin is as secure as a hotel. Many people have keys to your cabin and your cabin door may be left standing open for hours while the cleaning crews or cabin steward services the room. Cabin doors locks are sometimes horribly outdated and are not re-keyed as frequently as hotel rooms. Obviously, don't leave valuable items lying around. It is a good idea to have inventoried your luggage and photographed expensive items at home before you packed them at home in case of loss. Since most ship passengers are set up on a charge account system, be sure to use the ship safe deposit box for storage of valuable items, papers,

credit cards or extra cash. Use all locks on the cabin door including the night latch. Don't open your cabin door to strangers. Whatever the person wants can be expressed from the other side of the closed and locked door.

Just like in a hotel, protect your cabin key and cabin number. Dishonest crew or passengers will look for the opportunity to snatch a loose key or one that is left unattended.

Stay in Public Areas

Once on board and out to sea, don't assume that you are totally safe from criminal acts. While there is little danger of an outside predator robbing or attacking you on a cruise ship, crimes can just as easily be committed by crewmembers or by fellow passengers. Many cruise lines hire transient and seasonal employees at low wages. Because of this, turnover is high and cruise lines struggle to keep a ship fully staffed. While most crewmembers are hard-working and honest people, you cannot assume that the ship has properly screened that nice cabin attendant, waiter or below deck crew.

A rule of thumb is to stay only in the public areas. On large cruise ships, security personnel are on board and will patrol in plain clothes. Occasionally, someone will monitor video cameras in key public areas. Unlike land-based resorts, the ratio of passengers and crew to security staff is often inadequate.

Laws May Not Protect You

Although you boarded a ship in a US port doesn't mean that you are protected by our justice system. Most ships are registered in non-US countries and travel in territorial waters where US laws might not apply. The cruise industry does not report crime data consistently, if at all, to the FBI or have a database of ships with the most crime problems. Shipboard crimes sometimes fall into a "no man's land" of law enforcement. A crime can occur between two people of different nationalities, on a ship from a third country, and in the territorial waters of a fourth country. The governing law is the International Maritime Law and is not as well developed as US law. Reporting a crime on board a cruise ship doesn't mean anything will be done or that the crime will ever be investigated. The FBI is the only US law enforcement agency that can investigate a major crime but only if it occurs in International waters, otherwise crimes are reported to the jurisdiction of the closest foreign country and to the embassies of the parties involved. Prosecution of crime, in many cases, will be left in the hands of the local port authority where no one can predict the outcome.

Be aware that if you or your child gets into trouble on board a ship or in a port, you may be held accountable to the laws of a foreign country. The thing to do is to stay alert, be cautious, and stay safe while at sea. For details on the safety record of your cruise ship or how your ship will handle problems such as lost luggage or crime acts, contact the cruise line directly and ask for written disclosure of their policies and regulations.