

Disney Cruise Line Shore Excursions

Shore excursions are a major part of any cruise because a large part of your vacation is exploring the ports of call you will visit. You have just a few hours at each stop, but it should be enough to get a taste of the city you are visiting. It's so fun to wake up in a new port each day!

The concern many guests have is figuring out what the options are to choose from and which ones are a good idea and which are a mistake.

At a very basic level, there are two kinds of shore excursions: shore excursions offered by the cruise line and shore excursions offered by third parties.

Cruise Line Adventures

Shore excursions are sold directly by the cruise line to its guests, and they are group activities managed by local companies in each port that the cruise line has vetted and will stand by.

The great thing about excursions provided by the cruise line is that they guarantee if you take one of its shore excursions, they will ensure you do not miss the ship if you are delayed on the excursion.

Even if the ship is slated to leave, the ship will wait for your group to return or provide transportation for your group to meet up with the ship at the next port.

Furthermore, if your ship cannot dock at a port for any reason, any shore excursions you booked with the cruise line directly will be completely refunded.

On the flip side, cruise line-provided adventures tend to be more expensive than third-party shore excursions. They are typically large group tours, which means you are visiting areas with bus loads of people, and the tour will move at the slowest person in the group's pace.

There are also more limited offerings than you would find elsewhere.

Third-Party Shore Excursions

These are essentially any tour or activity you do on your own that is not sold to you by your cruise line. This can be a group tour or an individual tour. It can even be you taking a taxi somewhere and doing something on your own.

With third-party shore excursions, you are responsible for planning all aspects of the tour, so you will have to find a company or person, negotiate the rate and then find them in port and ensure you return on time.

There are some great vetted companies like **Venture Ashore** that offer excursions in many worldwide ports that guarantee they will get you back on time or they will cover the cost of getting you to the next port.

They have super interesting itineraries that get you as close to the action as possible and are custom private or small shared group tours. Whoever you choose, make sure to review the policies of what

happens if your ship cannot dock at the port and refunds because they vary from tour guide to tour guide.

Prices for third-party shore excursions can sometimes be negotiated, depending on the excursion and the guide, so they are often much cheaper than what you would get through the cruise line.

Additionally, often the age of a child is higher via a third-party shore excursion company than Disney's strict policy that a child is charged adult prices as soon as they turn 10. Many companies don't charge adult pricing for children until they are 13 years old; this can save you money too.

How to Get Started

I always recommend looking at the cruise-provided shore excursions first; they are a good starting point because they are simple to find and will give you a basis to compare other options later.

Here are my tips for choosing your shore excursions

Prioritize the Ports of Call That Drew You to the Itinerary.

For example, if you chose the Northern European cruise because of its stop in Copenhagen, then start choosing your shore excursion there. Or if you chose a Caribbean itinerary to enjoy marine wildlife, looking at a dolphin swim or nature excursion first is wise.

Research What the Port is Known For.

Before you even look at one shore excursion, you should research what each port is best known for. Typically, the individual ports you visit are best known for something and there can be a few activities that stand out among the rest.

Diversify Each Port.

If you want to enjoy a port adventure at each stop, pick a different style of shore excursion for each day. A sightseeing tour at one, a culinary or cultural experience at another, and something adventurous to round it out.

If You're on a Budget, Balance Tour and Non-tour Days.

Research which ports are closest to sights or have an enjoyable port area. When I did a Western Caribbean, we did excursions in Cozumel and Grand Cayman but chose not to plan anything for our Jamaica day. We walked around the shops on the cruise port, and then enjoyed a practically empty ship the rest of the day!

I really think you should try to budget for at least one WOW Excursion, especially on a cruise like Alaska or the Mediterranean. One incredible experience is going to create so many more memories than 2-3 mediocre ones.

Balance Full-Day and Half-Day Tours.

Back-to-back full-day tours can take the relaxation element out of a vacation. Long bus rides and early mornings can be exhausting, especially if you're bringing kids with you. When choosing an excursion, try to strike a balance between full- and half-day tours. You don't want to return home in need of a vacation from your vacation.

Be Realistic About Activity Level.

If you're traveling with little children, you may find your options are even more limited. Excursions with a lot of physical activity or walking may not be a good choice for those who have a stroller to push or who have mobility issues. Take this into consideration when you're choosing what to do.

Pay Attention to All the Words.

Complicated tours with multiple stops or activities often sound better than they are. The problem arises because people don't want to choose between two attractions, so they figure, why not do both? The answer is you often don't have enough time to visit each place or do each activity properly. When reading a tour description, you have to read between the lines. Compare the number of stops to the number of hours to deduce how long you'll have for each activity. Look on a map to see how far your destinations are from the port and determine if you'll be spending most of your time in transit.

Book Small-group Tours Early and Cancel Later.

If you aren't sure if something is going to fit the budget or if your child's interest is going to change, I recommend booking when your excursion date opens, as things often fill quickly. Make sure what you are booking has a flexible cancellation policy and decide later. You can not create availability if you wait too long.



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