

Grace's Cruises – Insider Travel Tip

What's Included on a Cruise — And What Costs Extra?

One of the most common questions first-time cruisers ask is:
“What’s actually included in the cruise fare?”

The good news is that cruises include far more than many people realize. However, there are also optional extras that can quickly add up if you’re not prepared.

Here’s a simple guide to what is typically included — and what usually costs extra — on many mainstream and premium cruise lines.

Cruise Lines Included in This Guide:

- Princess Cruises
- Holland America Line
- Celebrity Cruises
- Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL)
- Royal Caribbean
- Carnival Cruise Line
- Cunard Line
- Oceania Cruises
- Azamara

1. What's Usually Included

Most cruise fares already include:

- Your accommodations
- Main dining room meals
- Buffet dining
- Basic beverages (water, coffee, tea, juice)
- Entertainment and shows
- Pools and hot tubs
- Fitness center access
- Youth and kids programs
- Most onboard activities

Many first-time cruisers are surprised by how much value is already included in the base cruise fare.

2. Dining – Included vs Extra

Usually Included:

- Main dining room
- Buffet restaurants
- Casual dining venues (varies by cruise line)
- Pizza, burgers, snacks, soft serve ice cream (varies by cruise line)

Usually Extra:

- Specialty restaurants
- Steakhouse dining
- Chef's table experiences
- Premium coffee shops
- Certain desserts or specialty treats on some cruise lines

✦ **Tip:** Princess, Holland America, Celebrity, and Cunard tend to include more traditional dining experiences, while NCL and Royal Caribbean offer more specialty dining upgrades and casual dining variety.

3. Drinks – One of the Biggest Differences

Usually Included:

- Filtered water
- Basic coffee and tea
- Juice at breakfast
- Some fountain beverages in buffet areas

Usually Extra:

- Alcohol
- Sodas
- Specialty coffees
- Bottled water
- Fresh juices
- Smoothies

Cruise lines like Princess, Celebrity, Holland America, and NCL often promote bundled packages that include drinks, WiFi, and gratuities.

Azamara includes select alcoholic beverages as part of the cruise experience.

4. WiFi & Internet

On most cruise lines, WiFi is NOT included in the base fare.

Usually Extra:

- Internet packages
- Streaming packages
- Premium internet speeds

Some cruise lines now bundle WiFi into promotional packages:

- Princess Plus / Premier
- Celebrity All Included
- NCL More at Sea
- Holland America Have It All

5. Gratuities

This is one area that surprises many first-time cruisers.

Usually Extra:

- Daily gratuities/service charges
- Bar gratuities
- Specialty dining gratuities

Some cruise promotions may include prepaid gratuities as part of the package.

6. Entertainment & Activities

Usually Included:

- Production show
- Live music
- Comedy shows
- Trivia and games
- Fitness center access
- Pools and sports courts

Usually Extra:

- Spa treatments
- Casino gaming
- Select classes or specialty activities

Royal Caribbean tends to offer the largest variety of onboard activities, while Cunard focuses more on traditional enrichment and elegant entertainment.

7. Cruise Line Differences

Every cruise line approaches inclusions a little differently. Generally:

- Princess, Holland America, Celebrity, Cunard → more traditional premium experience
- Royal Caribbean, Carnival, NCL → more activity-focused with more optional upgrades
- Oceania and Azamara → more destination-focused cruising with enhanced dining and a more refined onboard atmosphere

That's why choosing the right cruise line matters just as much as choosing the itinerary.

Sometimes a cruise with a slightly higher upfront price may actually include:

- Drinks
- WiFi
- Gratuities
- Specialty dining
- Shore excursion credits

The "cheapest" cruise is not always the best overall value.

★ First-Time Cruiser Tip

Before booking, always look at:

- What's included
- What's extra
- What promotions are available
- What style of cruise experience you prefer

This helps avoid surprises and allows you to compare cruise lines more accurately.

🚢 Final Thoughts From Grace

Cruises can offer exceptional value, especially when you understand what is included before you sail. Some travelers prefer a lower base fare with optional upgrades, while others enjoy more inclusive cruise experiences with fewer onboard extras.

The best cruise experience is not simply about price — it's about finding the right balance of inclusions, atmosphere, and overall value for your travel style.

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