

TREK

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Trek of Highland Park's co-owner, Robble Ventura former pro-tour professional cyclist, Tour de France commentator and coach to hundreds of cyclists and triathletes.

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Smooth Sailing Ahead

At its best, cruising is a delightful, restful, and fun experience, creating new adventures and exotic memories. If not planned properly, a cruise can also be the source of a lot of headaches, not to mention extra expenses.



Mira Temkin

Take heed of these nine tips and you'll navigate the seas with ease.

Tip 1: Don't miss the boat. I've cruised from ports in Miami, Tampa, Galveston, San Diego, Vancouver, Barbados, and St. Thomas. The ship has never sailed without me. You know why? I arrive the day before. With tough winters and frequent flight cancellations, you're really gambling with lady-not-so-lucky if you plan to depart the day you sail. I shudder when I hear someone tell me they're flying out the same day they're boarding the ship. Besides, an extra day gives you a chance to unwind before you go aboard and allows you to spend a little quality time in the port city. Yes, even a flight the day before can get canceled, but you've got a much better chance with a two-day window.

Tip 2: Go home later. Give yourself some latitude! Don't book your return flight before 1pm; 2pm is even better. I read about one disgruntled passenger who berated the cruise line because she missed her noon flight home. Sorry, not their fault. The ships have more than 2,000 passengers to unload. Most ships dock at 7am, but between immigration and luggage handling, disembarkation is a process. Although the cruise lines will try to accommodate early flights, the ultimate problem will end up being yours. Take a tip from this captain and book your flight later in the day. Besides, you can always try and go stand by if all goes quickly and you get to the airport early. Sometimes, the cruise offers a city tour of your disembarkation port for flights departing after 2pm. That's a nice option, too.

Tip 3: Take a tote bag. When you're packing for your cruise, stuff a beach bag, tote, or heavy recycling bag in your suitcase. When you head to the pool and leave the boat for a shore excursion, you'll be happy you remembered this. Yes, some of the cruises give you a tote, but it's not meant to withstand a few days ashore. Bring your own.

Tip 4: Go overboard, get a verandah. As an open window to the world, a private verandah or balcony is a pure delight. I love sipping morning coffee, reading in the afternoon, and taking in the night breezes. Having a verandah gives you an even richer cruise experience. Sometimes you can upgrade to a verandah if there's space available on embarkation day. I say, go for it!

Tip 5: Leave your wallet onboard. I've discovered the best way to avoid having your wallet ripped off while in port is not to carry one. Take your cruise ID, one credit card, and \$20 for cabs and water. Leave your wallet locked up in your room safe.



MIRA TEMKIN

Temkin participating in a cooking class.

Tip 6: Ditto your purse. I never take my purse out of my room. I carry a little clutch bag with a string that holds my cruise card wherever I go around the ship. When in port, leaving your purse and bringing a tote also means much more room to carry souvenirs.

Tip 7: Collect something. While I'm not a collector in general, I have enjoyed collecting small jewelry boxes and other containers from various islands. I have a friend who collects coffee mugs from her travels. Whether it's refrigerator magnets, hats, or shot glasses, it's a nice reminder of the places you've visited.

Tip 8: Try something new. Cruise ships offer a world of activities onboard. Go out of your comfort zone a little bit. No, I don't mean try the climbing wall on Royal Caribbean's ships. I mean, try heading to the art auction. I once sailed with a friend who always attended the art auctions, something I had never done. It was fascinating. I learned something about the artists, their works, and now I'm hooked on attending the presentations. Sometimes, I even buy a piece. Take a cooking class, wine tasting or attend an enrichment program.

Tip 9: Sale on the sail. You can't go very far on the ship without running into a gift shop or special offers on jewelry, liquor, and T-shirts. Savvy passengers wait for the frequent sales, particularly on days when the ship is at sea. But the best deals are often toward the end of the voyage.

For more, visit Cruise Lines International Association at cruising.org.

Mira Temkin is a Highland Park-based freelance travel journalist who has ventured across Europe and visited most of the Caribbean Islands. Her travel articles have appeared in Chicago Tribune, Family Time Magazine, and six-00-three-five magazine. In addition, she is the Chicago Upscale Travel Examiner for examiner.com. She can be reached at miratemkin@gmail.com.

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Holland America Line's ms Oosterdam is the second in their series of vista-class ships.