

TIPS ON TRIPS

Pick The Cruise That's Right For You

(NAPSA)—With 70 percent of the planet covered in water, your next travel question might not be where to take a cruise, but where to go first.

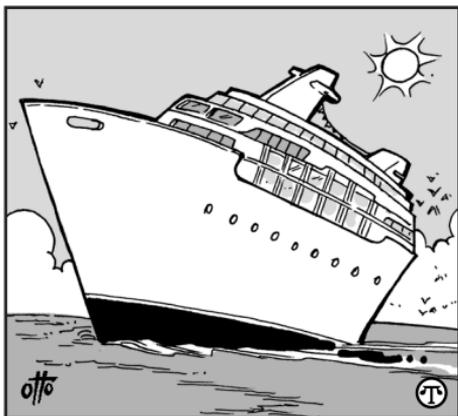
Cruise ships visit more than 1,800 ports around the world, providing you with rare glimpses into many cultures.

Many first-time cruisers choose the Caribbean or Mexican Riviera, where you pleasantly float from one island paradise to the next. Others prefer a cruise to Alaska to experience calving glaciers and curious whales while following either the Inside Passage or the Gulf of Alaska route, or take a fall cruise to New England and Canada, where they can watch the leaves turn.

Here are a few tips from the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA) to help you find the cruise that's right for you:

- The length of your trip largely depends on how much you can afford. Cruises offer everything from one- to two-night excursions out to sea and back, to journeys that take you around the world in 100 days. Less-frequented alternatives can save you money. For example, you can find a better rate by taking a four-day cruise in the middle of the week instead of the popular three-day weekend cruise.

- Consult a cruise specialist. Travel agents are often certified cruise specialists and they know which low Internet offers to avoid and which ports of call can make a great cruise unforgettable. A good cruise specialist may offer you group rates, free upgrades, ship-board credits and other discounts.



With so many wonderful cruise destinations to choose from, it's hard to know which port of call to visit first.

- Air/sea packages have pros and cons. They sound like a good deal because the price includes a flight from your home to the ship's port and back again. If you make your own flight arrangements, you may find a better deal, flying nonstop with an airline you prefer while earning frequent-flyer miles, but you will have to make other arrangements, such as transporting your luggage.

- Invest in travel insurance. It's a small price to pay for peace of mind. A policy is not only for trip cancellations but can also cover missed connections, lost or delayed baggage, emergency medical and dental expenses and emergency legal assistance. Some cruise lines offer cancellation waiver insurance, which applies to cancellations made several days prior to the scheduled start of the trip.

For more cruise tips, see an ASTA travel agent or visit www.travelsense.org.