

The Costa Concordia: Cruise Ship Vacation Wisdom

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Theme: [History](#)

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I have taken a number of cruise ship vacations. The last one was about a year and half ago. I learned a lot about cruise ships and what factors should go into decisions about selecting a specific cruise ship that I want to share with you. By now, of course, you have heard and seen a lot about the disaster of the Carnival Line's Costa Concordia off the Italian shore where a number of people died and thousands went through an awful time trying to escape and survive the heavily tilted and partially submerged modern, huge cruise ship. What should never have happened, happened. That, sadly, is the way of the world. You can and must learn from this disaster. Size matters. Smaller is better.

The most important thing I learned over time was that I would never, ever want to go on one of the new monumentally huge "floating city" cruise ships that carry three thousand or more passengers. Frankly, I have been amazed that so many people have succumbed to the marketing and advertising for such ships, as if bigger is better. Of course, they all look incredibly top heavy, with a large number of decks stacked very high on the ship. As a former engineering professor, they have always looked to me as inherently unstable and prone to tilting over in various conditions, such as very rough seas, with the potential for capsizing and sinking. Indeed, such modern humongous ships have had more problems than generally recognized.

But more to the point, when it comes to comfort, enjoyment and time well spent on a cruise ship, everyone should understand that the bigger the ship and the greater the number of passengers, the more time you will inevitably waste trying to get around, access shipboard amenities and restaurants, and deal with leaving and returning to the ship when it comes to shore excursions. On such gigantic ships you cannot escape dealing with multitudes of people that are bound to raise your stress level at a time when you are supposed to be on a totally relaxing vacation.

Thus, let me crystal clear about my choice for my last cruise vacation which was absolutely wonderful and perhaps the most enjoyable vacation of any type I ever had. I chose a Regent Seven Seas Cruise. All their ships are top of the line luxury and, most important, carry only about 800 passengers. Some other genuine luxury cruise lines have even smaller ships. In other words, in the world of cruise ships the very best are relatively small. The result is terrific: You never waste any time dealing with crowds or waiting on long lines trying to enjoy various places and activities. It is akin to being on a billionaire's private yacht, while going on the new generation of huge cruise ships is like shopping at a Wal-Mart on one of the busiest Christmas-period shopping days or going to Disney World on a very busy day.

Now to my second big piece of advice. You want to choose a cruise ship that includes

almost everything in the basic price of the vacation. If not, you will get sucked into a vacation where you find yourself shelling out more money all the time. On the Regent and similar luxury cruise lines they are all-inclusive, meaning that all the alcoholic drinks you want are part of the basic price. You can go to a multitude of bars and other venues and have all the high quality beers, wines of hard liquor drinks you want without paying anything or tipping. Ditto for room service. Oh yes, all the tips for all the service providers are also part of the basic cruise price. Similarly, there are a large number of shore excursions that you do not have to pay additional fees for. Same is true for all the high-end restaurants.

Trust me, if you choose the more prevalent cruise vacations you will end up paying money all the time that will jack up the cost of your vacation by a large amount. You may even have to pay for soft drinks! And every day you will lose many minutes and perhaps a few hours because of all the crowds you must cope with.

What all the advertising and sales pitches fail to really reveal are these ugly truths about ordinary cruise lines, even though they may use words like luxury. And now you have seen with the incredible Concordia disaster what a penalty you pay if something serious goes wrong on a cruise vacation when there are THOUSANDS of passengers all trying to save their lives under the most awful conditions. The analogy with some truth is thinking about the World Trade Center skyscrapers that collapsed on 9/11 2001. In terms of personal risk management you want to avoid putting yourself in any situation with an incredibly large number of floors and people when a low probability disaster actually happens. You can get trapped in a gigantic cruise ship just like you could in a skyscraper.

Sure, a cruise vacation can be wonderful. But do not get fooled by sophisticated and deceptive marketing, especially the use of the term luxury. You can only get luxury on a relatively small cruise ship. Learn how to make a good decision.

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