

Exclusive Insider Tips for Taking a Cruise with Kids

1) Unpack Right Away

You need to pack as light as you can while still bringing all of the things you need because space will be limited in your cruise cabin. When we first arrived in our cabin, I was planning to do what I usually do on vacation and live out of our suitcases. But I quickly realized this would not be possible due to the limited space. There was no place to keep even one suitcase lying open.

So I had to unpack and utilize the closet and drawers provided in the room. But this ended up working out nicely. Aside from the hassle of having to unpack and pack back up at the end of the trip, it was very convenient to live out of an organized closet instead of a messy suitcase.

Also, the storage space available is well-thought out and there is more space than it originally appears. We brought two large suitcases and one medium suit case full of clothing, toiletries, shoes, swimming paraphernalia, diapers, and other belongings. I was sure there was no way it would all fit into the available drawers. But it all easily fit!

Unpack as soon as you can so that you can relax and enjoy the rest of your trip.

2) Food Waste

Cruise lines waste A LOT of food. When it's time to close up the buffet, they will lower the curtains on the remaining food, but don't let that deter you. If there is still food on the buffet counter and you didn't quite make it in time to get the kids a snack, it's totally okay to sneak food from under the curtain. Because you know what they are going to do with that food once the curtains go down? DUMP IT. Better to go into your kids' hungry stomachs than the trash.

This is also a good reason not to guiltily shovel in the rest of the food on your plate so as not to waste it. No matter how much food you took off of that buffet counter that you didn't need, it was going to be wasted anyway. So don't believe the lie that you need to finish your food to avoid wasting it.

3) Haggling Prices

While touring at your cruise's destination stops, remember that in a lot of cultures, it is normal and even expected to haggle prices down. My husband bought a handmade stuffed dog for our daughter that was priced at \$40. But he haggled the price down to \$17.

Also, the exchange rate might vary depending on where you are making a purchase. At the port entrance of our stop in Costa Maya, the exchange rate was 18 Pesos for \$1 USD. However, further into the island where we spent the most of our money, the exchange rate was 20 Pesos for \$1 USD. Also ask the merchant to give you the higher exchange rate if you know it is offered in other stores or restaurants.

4) Put Wet Things Outside to Dry

The inside of our private cabin on the ship never seemed to dry out without assistance from the cleaning lady. Because of this, hanging swimsuits or wet towels in the bathroom was not an effective way of airing them out to dry. As a matter of fact, our swimsuits began to stink after a few days of NOT drying hanging in the bathroom.

Consequently, we had to start laying our swimsuits on our balcony chairs to dry. If you get a balcony room (which I HIGHLY recommend), utilize that space to dry out swimsuits or any towels you are not wanting replaced by the cleaning lady.

5) Don't Rely on the Cruise Line for Tips

Make sure your cleaning lady gets her tip by asking at the service desk for the automatic gratuity charged to your account to be removed. My husband had read online that the staff never see that money if you leave it up to the cruise line and I believe it. You can ask at the service desk for that charge to be removed and then leave a cash tip in the room for your cleaning lady.

6) Pack Up Early the Day Before Disembarkation

This is something I completely failed to do on our cruise. And I regretted it. With a hectic last day of lengthy and messy kids' meals, toddler naps, and trying to do last-minute activities we did not get to do the rest of the week, I did not start packing until evening. But after living in that room for a week, we had made ourselves rather at home, and packing everything back in the suitcases took a while.

We all ended up going to bed very late that night because I needed to have the lights on to pack. And because we had to be out of our room by 8am, it was a short night for everyone. Ideally, you should start packing up no later than mid-afternoon to make sure you have enough time to get to bed at a decent time – or finish up your vacation with some late-night fun.