



Late Summer Brings Great Cruise Deals

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It's only two weeks until Labor Day, but that doesn't mean it's too late to squeeze in an end-of-summer vacation.

Now is one of the best times of the year to get a great deal on a cruise, before sending the kids back to school, according to Stewart Chiron, the president of Leisure Pros, who is also known as "the Cruise Guy."

"Travel starts to slow down around this time of year, so cruise lines are really trying to get you on board. That means they will throw rock bottom prices your way, and give you fantastic incentives like upgraded cabins, or deals for being 55 or older, or for leaving from certain areas of the country," Chiron told Good Morning America.

Plus, the weather is lovely in the Caribbean this time of year, and there are smaller crowds when you dock in the port towns, he said.

One of the cheapest deals around is Carnival Cruise Lines' Fascination or Imagination cruise ships, which are now as low as \$249, down from \$729. The deal includes a three-night cruise to the Bahamas or Western Caribbean, leaving from Miami.

"It's a great way to learn what a cruise is all about, if you've never been on a cruise before," Chiron said. "Or it's great for busy people, who want to get away but can't take a week off from work."

Most cruise ships usually have three to four pools, seven to 10 Jacuzzis, and a variety of dining experiences. All basic meals are paid for, and additional meals are available.

Shipboard activities range from gambling to classes for your children. Many ships have Internet cafes and some also have connections in cabins. All of the ships have acres of deck space, and transportation to ports of call is included.

Love Boat Lookalikes

For romantics, Princess Cruises have the newest "Love Boats," the Princess line ships that were actually featured on the TV show The Love Boat.

Princess Cruises offer cruises aboard the Golden Princess or Grand Princess, which include 7 nights in the Eastern or Western Caribbean, with cruises from Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Prices were from \$1,519 per person, and now they are \$549 per person

The cruise takes passengers to St. John, St. Thomas and Princess Cays, the lines' private island, and several other spots, including Cozumel in Mexico. They are five-star ships, and are great for those traveling with children, Chiron said.

The Royal Caribbean's Explorer of the Seas and its new Navigator of the Seas cruises have unusual activities including rock climbing up the smokestacks of the ship. They also offer inline skating and ice skating. The Royal Caribbean cruises are the only ships in the world that have these activities. The

ships also have miniature golf and full court basketball courts.

The Explorer of the Seas or Navigator of the Seas ships offer seven nights in the Eastern or Western Caribbean, departing from Miami. Some of the stops include San Juan, Grand Cayman and Ocho Rios. Prices were just over \$1,700, but are now going for \$699 per person.

Whale Watching in Sea of Cortez

Another unique cruise deal is Holland America's Statendam or Ryndam cruises, which are 7-night cruises of the Mexican Riviera or Sea of Cortez, leaving from San Diego. Prices were \$1,627 per person, and are now \$599 per person.

Holland America's Statendam or Ryndam cruises go to the Mexican Riviera and the Sea of Cortez from San Diego for seven to 10 nights. It is the only cruise line that goes to the Sea of Cortez, which allows a great opportunity to go whale watching. The cruises normally cost a little more than \$1,600, but are now going for \$599.

Another cruise that is really a good value is from Oceania Cruises' Regatta 10-night Caribbean, Panama Canal or Mexican Riviera cruises from Miami or Los Angeles. Prices were from \$2,790 per person, but now they are \$1,395 per person.

Oceania Cruises "ultra premium" Regatta tours the Caribbean, Panama Canal or Mexican Riviera, leaving from Miami, Puerto Caldera or Los Angeles, for a 10-night to two-week voyage.

Prices were from \$2,790 per person, and are now from \$1,395 per person. The deals are a five-star experience at about two-thirds of the normal cost, Chiron said.

"The sailings from Europe to the United States are already sold out," he said. "These ships are intimate. They have some of the best food of any cruise ships — four separate restaurants, all with open seating. They have the most comfortable cabins and best beds. This is really a luxurious ship."

All of the deals are valid now through February 2004. For more information, call 1-800-700-1607 or www.cruiseguy.com.

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