

7 cruise ship packing mistakes you want to avoid at all costs

(Courtesy of Sherri Eisenberg, The Points Guy)

Packing for a cruise can be more complicated than for other vacations – leaving extra room for packing mistakes. Rigid dress codes, changeable weather and minimal storage space can turn routine packing into some kind of torturous hazing ritual. Get it wrong, and you'll pay the price – by not getting full value from your cruise vacation or, literally, because you'll need to buy necessities on your trip.

Here are seven cruise ship packing mistakes to avoid on your next vacation.

1. [Packing first-day necessities in your checked luggage](#)
2. [Ignoring the dress code](#)
3. [Not checking the weather forecast](#)
4. [Packing all your belongings in checked bags](#)
5. [Not protecting your liquids](#)
6. [Packing too many pairs of shoes](#)
7. [Not packing properly at the end of your cruise](#)

Packing first-day necessities in your checked luggage

Most cruise travelers hand their larger bags to a porter at the pier so they don't have to drag their luggage up the gangway and around the ship until their cabin is ready. Since the crew won't deliver your bags to your cabin until later that day, you'll spend a big chunk of day one with only your [carry-on bag](#).

One of the biggest mistakes cruisers make is forgetting to place all medication, documents (including your passport), chargers and a change of clothes in their carry-on. You'll likely need these items in order to board or sometime during that first afternoon.

Cautionary tale: On the first day of Caribbean cruises, you'll always see some passengers staring longingly at the pool area while they sweat it out in their travel clothes. They clearly forgot to stash their bathing suit, a T-shirt and shorts in their carry-on and are missing out on those first few hours of cruise ship fun.

Ignoring the dress code

Some cruise lines, such as [Norwegian Cruise Line](#), don't really care what you wear to dinner. Others, such as [Silversea Cruises](#), [Cunard Line](#) and [Crystal Cruises](#), still have black-tie optional formal nights. Ignore the written dress code and you might find yourself kicked out of dinner for wearing shorts, jeans, flip flops or even a business casual outfit without a jacket. Read the fine print before you start packing so you don't leave key eveningwear at home.

Cautionary tale: On one of the first cruises I ever took, I skipped this step and found myself eating multiple "formal night" dinners in my cabin to avoid the fashion police. Sure, having fine dining room

service in bed with a movie is its own treat, but it would have been nice to have the option of sharing the evening with other passengers.

Not checking the weather forecast

Depending on when you're cruising, weather can vary widely in some cruise-friendly destinations, and global warming has had a real impact on some areas as well. In Alaska, for example, the beginning and end of the season is usually cooler than a mid-summer cruise – but not always.

And, yes, it does rain and get chilly even in beautiful Caribbean destinations. If you don't look at the weather forecast before you pack, you're bound to waste shore time and money buying more weather-appropriate clothing or hunting down umbrellas and ponchos.

Cautionary tale: Who knew that destinations in northern Scotland reached frigid temperatures in August? I didn't and found myself wasting precious port time searching for wool hats, gloves, scarves and sweaters to fight off the damp, wintry chill I hadn't accounted for on a late-summer sailing.

Packing all your belongings in checked bags

Let's face it: [Delayed and lost luggage](#) situations eventually happen to everyone who checks a bag. But they're more serious when you're flying into a destination in the morning and your ship is sailing out later that day. A rookie cruise packing mistake is to pack all of your clothing and toiletries in your checked bags, putting you at risk of losing everything should your luggage go missing.

Instead, stash a couple of outfits and key toiletries in your carry-on. I also suggest packing some of your clothing in your travel companion's suitcase — and vice versa — so if only one of the suitcases arrives at your destination, you both will have something clean to wear.

Cautionary tale: On a Scandinavian cruise out of Belfast, I arrived on time but my bag didn't. The airline tried to get it to me before the ship sailed to no avail.

Not protecting your liquids

If you're checking bags, you're not limited to [travel sizes of liquid toiletries](#) such as shampoo and body wash. You also have room to bring your favorite bottle of wine on your cruise vacation or bring home souvenir bottles of wine or liquor from destinations such as California, France, Italy or New Zealand. However, it only takes one leaky or broken bottle to discover that one of the worst cruise packing mistakes you can make is not protecting your liquids with bubble wrap or inside zip-up plastic bags.

Cautionary tale: I've heard stories of other passengers who threw full-size bottles in their luggage ... only to spend the first night on board in the cruise ship laundry room washing mouthwash out of all of their clothes.

Packing too many pairs of shoes

Nothing eats up luggage space like shoes — especially sneakers and dress shoes. Don't make the mistake of packing more sneakers, flats, heels and sandals than you actually need or you'll be forced to check a bag (or, worse, check two). Nor do you want to bring too many shoes and not enough clothing layers.

Do your best to design a cruise week wardrobe that works with just a couple of pairs of footwear. My advice: Stick to one pair of flip flops and one pair of sandals in a sunny destination rather than bringing along a wide variety of options.

Cautionary tale: I packed workout sneakers on a few sailings and watched them sit idly in my cabin as the week progressed because I never made it to the ship's gym. That space in the suitcase would have accommodated some larger souvenirs that had to be shipped home instead.

Not packing properly at the end of your cruise

Don't think your packing woes end when you and your bags board your cruise ship. You've still got plenty of room for mistakes when packing for your trip home at the end of your vacation.

Just as you set aside your tech toys, your plane read and your medications for the first day of your trip, you want to carefully pack your carry-on and checked bag for the return trip home so you don't have to do any reshuffling in your bags at the airport. Don't mix your clean clothes with your dirty ones or you'll have more apres-cruise laundry to do. Cushion any breakable souvenirs with your softest shirts or sweaters.

Most importantly, if you place your bags outside your cabin on the last night of the cruise so crew members will carry them off the ship for you, set aside a change of clothes, travel shoes and toiletries for the next morning. The biggest packing mistake rookie cruisers make is forgetting to leave out clothes and disembarking in their pajamas.

Cautionary tale: I once watched a fellow cruiser tear apart their bags in the airport check-in line, desperately looking through souvenirs and underwear alike for the headphones they carelessly tossed into a bag they were planning to check — hoping to be spared the ones the airline has on offer in coach.

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