

SAFN Sails the Seas Update #7

How to Use Your Cell Phone on a Cruise Ship

And Top Things to Do on Embarkation Day

Before I share more tips, I have a few **reminders**: *Count down, 30 days until we sail....*

*email Kay (kfryman1@aol.com) the name you want printed on your nametag

*email Kay if you want to pre-order your memory book

*if you haven't, make your hotel reservations

*make your free ship entertainment reservations on the Royal Caribbean site

*make flight reservations

*remember to dine in the **main dining room** on the first and last nights at sea

*do **not** buy a lanyard, one will be provided by SAFN

*cruise line luggage "tags" will be provided to those who are staying at the hotel

*anyone may attend the CE offerings at no cost but if you want continuing education credit you need to sign in AND have your nurse **license number**

***If you have any special needs that you have not yet provided to Susan**, such as the need for wheelchair assistance at the pier for embarkation and disembarkation; sharps container; refrigerator for insulin; distilled water for CPAP machine you are bringing; or if you have food allergies or physical issues that must be noted; please contact her right away: scombs@dreamvacations.com.

***Important Check-In Reminders**: Complete your online check-in at www.royalcaribbean.com where you will download and print your boarding pass to bring with you to check in for the cruise. (Instructions can be found in Update #1). You do NOT have to upload a photo now – you can wait and have them take your photo at the pier. If you have technical difficulty logging in, Royal Caribbean has a help desk number: 800-443-5789. If you absolutely cannot check in online, you can check in at the pier when you arrive – it just takes longer.

*If you wish to purchase beverage packages, internet packages and dining packages, they are available to purchase online through your online Cruise Planner at a reduced cost until 3 days prior to sailing. They can be purchased onboard at their regular cost.

Cell Phone Use on a Cruise:

If you plan to use your cell phone on the cruise, it's important to know that once you sail away from the embarkation port, your cell phone will go into roaming mode, which translates into higher rates and extra fees. While it's impossible to avoid these charges altogether, there are ways to lessen the costs. Here are the cheapest ways to use your cell phone while you're at sea:

1.. Check what your cell phone provider offers.

Major wireless providers have a cruise ship plan with lower rates than regular roaming rates. Contact your provider to sign up for the plan before you depart. Wireless carriers offer data, messaging, and calling plans for cruise ships that are similar to on-land packages, so you can pick the one that best suits your needs. Remember that if you buy the cruise ship plan from your wireless provider, those rates only apply when you're in international waters. Once you're within 12 miles of a port, the roaming rates for that country apply (so you will need a foreign country plan if you want to use Wi-Fi once near ports).

2. Consider buying a Wi-Fi package onboard.

If you only need the Internet for your smartphone, turn off the phone's data usage and roaming so that your phone will only connect to the ship's Wi-Fi (put your phone in "airplane mode" and choose to connect through Wi-Fi). On Royal Caribbean you can stay connected while onboard with VOOM - the fastest internet at sea. Share your adventure and upload content to Facebook and Instagram, post videos to YouTube, tweet on Twitter, and have face-to-face conversations via Google Hangouts and Skype. Plus, you can even stream movies, games and apps via your personal accounts with DIRECTV, Netflix, Hulu and more. Voom Surf & Stream package for two devices costs \$25.58 per day. That means you can be using a smart phone and a laptop at the same time or two smart phones, etc. If you only plan to use one device at a time, the cost is \$14.39 per day. These prices reflect a 20-30% discount. This is the sale price now, before you board. It will be more if you wait until after you board. And don't forget, Apple's iMessage service is sent over a wireless signal, so if you use that function to communicate with other iPhone devices while connected to Wi-Fi, you can still text.

3. Download **Ship Mate (Free)**.

If you're like me and want to know every little detail about our upcoming cruise, there's an app for that! ShipMate has been voted the #1 cruise app for ship info, including deck plans, itineraries, port details, cruising photos and more. There's even a cruise countdown ... *are you excited about your cruise yet?* Ship Mate gives users access to reviews, tips, roll calls, and cruise countdowns, but the best part is that many of its features can be used offline. Once you punch in your sailing, you can find your way around the ship with deck plans, learn about all the onboard entertainment and dining, and even get info about the ports you'll be visiting, all without using a single byte of data or racking up roaming charges. If you do purchase a Wi-Fi package (step 2), you'll have access to the app's full list of features, including direct messaging (which you can use instead of texting) and thousands of user photos and tips. Ship Mate is available for iOS and Android devices.

4. Know how to post to social media via text.

You can Tweet by sending texts to your Twitter account, which — depending on your Twitter habits — may be cheaper than a data plan. Just text "start" to 40404 and follow the instructions. Once finished, you can text your Tweet to the 40404 short code, and it will post to your Twitter account, no Internet needed. Facebook has a similar feature, allowing you to text your updates to a short code.

5. Instagram (Free).

A photo, editing and social sharing app is Instagram. The great thing about this app is that even when you don't have access to Wi-Fi, you can still take photos, add captions and then add them to a queue for later. Then, when you get into port, or have access to Wi-Fi, you can publish to your Twitter and Facebook channels for friends and family to see back home.

6. Oanda Currency Converter (Free).

For the most part, it's not necessary to exchange money on cruises with port days in the Caribbean because U.S. dollars are widely accepted. However, I have had many experiences where U.S. dollars have been rendered and the local currency has been returned. This app is great because it can be used without Wi-Fi (will revert to the most recent exchange rate before data was disabled) and clearly displays the conversion, so you don't have to figure the exchange in your head.

Embarkation Day! OK, let's get on board Saturday, September 9, 2017 is finally here!

1. **DO turn your phone to "airplane mode".** *To ensure you won't incur any data or roaming charges while onboard the ship, turn your phone on airplane mode as soon as soon as you embark. Leave Wi-Fi on if you want to purchase minutes on the ship or for use in port.*
2. **DON'T take the elevators.** You and several hundred other passengers are trying to get to your staterooms when you get onboard, head to dinner, and check out all the floors. Waiting for the elevators can be maddening. If you're physically able (and pack light like I keep telling you), take the stairs and save the elevators for the older folks that truly need it. Besides, this is a great habit throughout the duration of the cruise. The calorie burn will help counter the chocolate lava cake you're going to eat at dinner (not cancel out, just help).
3. **Do have your camera ready** – One of the best times to take pictures is embarkation day as many venues are empty. Get those professional looking photos completed early so you can relax and enjoy your vacation. If the weather is good, go straight to the top decks, this might be your only chance to get pictures with no one in the pool.
4. **Do explore the ship** – If you're as vigilant as I am, then you have probably read tons of reader reviews & SAFN Updates, studied the deck plans, and know everything about the ship and your itinerary. Still, there is much you can discover once you step foot on the ship. Embarkation day is the perfect time to start the journey.
5. **Do wait to head to your cabin**– Most ships' cabins are not ready until a few hours before departure. The staff is busy cleaning and preparing the room for you. Normally, this means those hallways and passages are closed off to travelers. Once onboard, enjoy all of the open venues while you wait for your cabin to be ready.
6. **Do bring a well-stocked carry on.** Suitcases will be delivered to your room as soon as possible. For some, that might not be until late in the evening. Ensure you pack anything you need such as medications & travel documents in a bag to bring on the ship with you. It's good to pack swimsuits and sunscreen, so you can jump in the pool even before your bags make it to the room. Note that they may not arrive before dinner, so plan accordingly.
7. **Do wait to eat at the buffet, or skip it completely** – Many cruise ships offer a variety of dining options on embarkation day besides the buffet. Even if your ship does not have any other options for lunch, wait a little while before trying to grab a bite to eat. The crowds tend to be quieter during late lunch as other travelers head to their staterooms. Eating at an off time is one of the smart **Things to do on a Cruise on Embarkation Day!**
8. **Do check for first day deals.** Walk around the atrium decks and see what deals are going on the first day. This is good opportunity to make reservations for wine tastings, special dinners, and spa packages at a discount rate. Good hunting!

9. **Do bring your wine on board to save money.** Two 750 ml bottles of wine or champagne per stateroom can be brought on during boarding day only. This is a great way to save a little money. You can NOT bring on liquor or beer. If you purchase alcohol in port, it will be held until the last day of the sailing. Royal Caribbean no longer charges a corking fee. Yay! They also now allow wine to be consumed in any shipboard restaurant, dining venue, or within the guests' stateroom. Ask your stateroom attendant to bring you a wine glass. You can't bring nonalcoholic beverages such as water or soda onboard, so please keep this in mind. Cases of water and soda used to be allowed on during embarkation. Not allowing it is now the official policy per their website and a call to RC.

10. **Do meet your stateroom attendant** – Your stateroom attendant will be taking care of you all week, so getting to know him/her will be helpful, especially if you have any special requests. On the first day, he/she will try to track you down, so take a few minutes to have a conversation. This can go a long way and might lead to some special treatment which will really enhance your vacation.

11. **Do unpack.** See that mat on your bed when you check into your room? That's for putting your suitcase on for unpacking. I like to unpack the moment I check into my room. The sooner you unpack and get settled into your room, the sooner your brain can switch to vacation mode.

12. **Do watch the ship leave port.** If you're cruising for the first time, you'll want to see the ship leave port (and aren't you glad you've unpacked already). You can watch from your balcony or one of the top decks. This is a great photo opportunity.

13. **DON'T skip muster.** Muster drill usually occurs about a half hour or so from leaving port. No matter how many times you've cruised, muster is a requirement. And on some cruise lines, they don't just do a general head count, they will scan your cards and require you to attend muster the following day if you try to get clever and skip. Trust me, remedial muster is like detention in school. Besides, in the event of an actual emergency, you'll want to know the evacuation procedures. Don't worry, it doesn't take long, and everyone looks great in orange.

14. **Do attend dinner in the main dining room.** The only deadline I care about on a cruise ship is dinner. On the first night at dinner, you'll find your assigned table and meet your cheery wait staff. If you have dietary restrictions, this is the best time to speak with your wait staff about your needs. Your waiters will greet you by name throughout the cruise and take excellent care of you. SAFN has assigned tables and the only night you need to sit at an assigned table is the first night. After that, you may sit at any of our SAFN tables. Please do not book specialty dinners on the first or last nights at sea (Saturday the 9th or Friday the 15th of September). SAFN will have special events those nights. Also, dinner is at 6 (1800).

15. **Do exercise.** I used to gain about a pound a day on cruises. But I quit gaining weight on cruises when I started taking the stairs, hit the gym/track on sea days, and made good choices at dinner. If you're not so health conscious, I do suggest at least walking the decks the first morning of the first sea day. I like to start on deck 1, walk a lap, take the stairs up to deck 2, walk a lap, go up to deck 3, walk a lap, etc. This is the best way to get oriented with the layout of the ship, and you might find some hot spots you'd like to revisit later in the cruise (hey, wine tastings!). And fun fact: about 4 full decks walked is about a mile (not sure on the Harmony because it is larger, so probably less decks that need to be walked). And a mile walked is about a half a glass of wine worth of calories.

16. **Do make any outstanding reservations or appointments.** If you have not already pre-booked things like specialty dining, shore excursions, or entertainment (if need be) then today is the day to get that

done. Spots are sure to be limited, and you do not want to miss out on any of the amazing cruise events because you did not reserve it when you had the chance. Get to the appropriate service desk as soon as it opens to make those final arrangements.

17. **Do pace yourself and don't go overboard** – The excitement of the first day can be overwhelming. Even after all my cruises, I still get goose bumps when embarking on a new ship. But, you have the entire vacation to do and see everything, so pace yourself. Don't try to get it all done on the first day because you will burn yourself out. Spread out the fun and excitement. One of the worst **Things to do on a Cruise** is start day two with a hangover!

There you have it, my **Top Things to do on a Cruise on Embarkation Day**. Now, all you need to do is figure out what you are going to do on the remaining days of the cruise...and enjoy every minute of your vacation! One more update coming in early September with a few last-minute reminders. If there is something you want me to mention, please let me know soon so it can be included.

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