

Everything You Need To Know About Your 4-day Cozumel Cruise On Carnival's INSPIRATION

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The UNOFFICIAL guide to making the absolute most out of your 4-day cruise to Cozumel, Mexico aboard Carnival's mega-ship, *The Inspiration*.

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Publisher's Note: The pages seen in this excerpt are as they appear in the electronic book version of our guides. Printed copies are black and white interiors. All pictures are grayscale.

Chapter 9: Before You Go

You can avoid frustrations and bottle-necks in your cruise experience if you take a little time to handle a few things before you leave for the port.

Packing

Keep in mind that you are going to be spending 4 days and 4 nights on a casual, sun-soaked vacation that includes lots of water and hanging out. You probably won't use about 2/3 of the clothes and things you bring. It's almost impossible to pack too light for a cruise. Check out our **Sample Packing Check List** in the appendix (page 71), and do it at least a week before you start packing, if possible.

According to Carnival, there is no limit set on the amount of luggage you may bring so long as it fits in your stateroom. Each piece of luggage must be locked (once you get to the terminal) and have a colored bag tag listing the guest's name, ship and stateroom number. Bag tags are mailed with cruise documents and additional tags can be obtained at curbside from the porter, if necessary.

We recommend that you use one large suitcase; one garment bag (if you need it) and one carry-on bag per person.

CARRY ON BAG:

- ALL of your valuables, including your travel documents and wallet
- Medicines and first aid products (Band aids, gauze, pain relief, indigestion aids, sunburn medication, Dramamine)
- Toiletries
- Change of clothes & bathing suit
- Computer and any other electronics (MP3 Player, camera, etc)
- If you wear glasses, it's a good idea to pack an extra pair
- About a dozen sandwich bags (we'll tell you why later)

As a rule, anything that you simply cannot do without should be in your Carry-On Bag. Also, keep in mind that it could be several hours before you get your luggage delivered to your cabin, so have the necessary comfort items in this bag also. This can be a back-pack, duffel bag or small suitcase with wheels.

LARGE SUITE CASE:

- All remaining clothing. Dress onboard is informal & you ARE on vacation, so pack for fun. Cruise lines do not allow bathing suits, shorts, or cover ups in the main dining rooms during dinner seating, so you will need to wear something nice but not necessarily Sunday Best.
- There will be one formal or dress up night on the cruise. On this night you will see everything from formal wear (evening gowns and tuxedos) to dressy casual. Many passengers take full advantage of this opportunity to put on the ritz, and it is a perfect time to get some nice portraits done. But you don't have to dress up if you don't feel like it. If not wearing formal dress, many ladies wear a nice Sunday Dress or Dress Pant Suite and gents wear coat & tie.
- Personal items not required immediately – rain poncho/raincoat; small back pack or tote bag, extra pillow, bottle of wine or champagne, nonalcoholic beverages or bottled water, etc.
- HINT: Pack a couple of plastic grocery bags or trash bags. You can use them to keep your soiled clothes in during the cruise and at end of curies you can put your wet suite or dirty socks in them. (And don't forget the sandwich bags.)

GARMENT BAG (if needed):

- Any hang-up items, especially if you are bringing formal wear. Once on board if you need to press something your cabin steward will be happy to get you an iron.

DO THIS WITH ALL YOUR LUGGAGE

Put something **DISTINCTIVE** on the handle of any luggage you take that will make your luggage stand out. Tie a piece of rope on the handle, wrap some duct tape on the handle, buy some colored scrub balls and tie on to your handle, put a small stuffed animal on it. Do something noticeable.

There is a lot of luggage that looks like yours and when it is taken off the ship at debarkation, your luggage will be placed in a **BIG** room (think football fields here) with **THOUSANDS** of other pieces of luggage, many pieces of which will look just like yours. These distinctive, colorful decorations will help you locate your bag amongst the mountains of luggage, but that's not the most important reason to do it.

Some of your fellow passengers will have stayed up late the night before and may have had a bit too much fun. Others will be ready to get the heck out of the throng of people, porters and acres of luggage. These folks may not be seeing clearly or may not be paying attention as they navigate through the big room. They may look at your luggage with blurry, impatient eyes and think "Hey, this looks like mine." and take it without looking at the name tag. Major bummer. If this happens, you might have to wait till everyone is off the ship (which could take a couple of hours) and then see who left a bag that looks like yours. Get the picture? **Make your luggage distinctive.**

Travel Documents

STOP WHAT YOU ARE DOING RIGHT NOW AND MAKE SURE YOU HAVE EITHER A CURRENT PASSPORT (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED) OR A CERTIFIED COPY OF YOUR BIRTH CERTIFICATE.



As of this writing, you can still use your birth certificate as proof of citizenship for boarding the ship, but that is scheduled to change on January 1, 2008. After that, you will need a passport. **You won't be able to board the ship unless you have one or the other of these**, so make sure they are in your possession for everyone in your party. Minors need documents also.

IMPORTANT: If something happens and you have to fly home (missed ship, sickness, emergency, etc.), you won't be able to enter the US without a valid passport.

Don't wait until the last minute to lay your hands on these documents. It will drive you CRAZY if you can't find them.

Cruise Packet

You will receive a packet of cruise documents and boarding information from your travel agent or directly from Carnival if you book through them. Check these documents carefully and make sure the spelling of your name and your birth date match your passport/birth certificate. If there is a problem, contact Carnival or your travel agent immediately and get it straightened or it will have to be handled at the check in desk and that can slow you down getting on board and starting your vacation. Once you get your cruise documents, you will need to go on line and pre-register. Go to www.carnival.com and select "Fun Pass" in the blue field at the bottom of the page. You will be directed to a check-in page.

To check-in, you will need your **Booking Number**, the name of the ship and the date of your cruise (included in your cruise documents). You will also need your Passport Number. **Carnival requires that you do this before midnight of the day prior to the departure date.** If you don't get it done, it will definitely slow down your check-in process at the port. – get it done!

Once you've completed the Fun Pass for each traveler, print out the pages and keep them with your passport and your other cruise documents.

When Should You Travel To The Port?

One of the great appeals of this short, 4-day cruise is that you don't have to take so much time off work or away from home in general. Still, many folks prefer to arrive in Tampa early

and spend the night before their cruise resting up or getting into the party mode. Plus, not having to rush to the terminal in the morning is a real plus. It makes the whole vacation seem longer.

Of course, it is also nice to be able to fly in to Tampa, catch an airport shuttle to the cruise terminal, get on board and just repeat the process when you get back. The nice thing about cruising out of Tampa is that it's easy enough to do it either way.

Park & Cruise.

If you arrive the day before your cruise, many hotels in Tampa offer a package deal that includes staying at their hotel overnight, leaving your car in their parking lot and catching a shuttle to the cruise terminal in the morning. Since you're going to pay \$12/day to park at the terminal (\$48 for the 4 days of the cruise), this can actually be a smart money solution. It is a very convenient way to get to the port, you don't have to hassle with traffic or finding a parking place and you get dropped off right at the door where you turn over your luggage.

They will also send a shuttle to pick you up when you return and take you back to the hotel to get your car. But this is where it can get frustrating. Most hotels don't have a fleet of shuttles for this purpose, they only have one. And when that one gets full, it has to return to the hotel, drop off its passengers and then come back to the cruise terminal. There have been times when we have gotten off the ship just fine, but had to wait over an hour for the shuttle to come back and get us. YUCK!

If that happens, we think you're better off just paying for a cab or one of the other shuttle services around, rather than waiting for the hotel to send their guys back. Yes, it will cost extra, and you may still have to wait a bit if you are taking a shuttle (they want to get as many passengers as possible before they leave), but in our view it beats the heck out of hanging out at the port for an hour or more.

Flying In

Tampa International Airport is a very well-designed, easy to navigate airport. No matter which airline you use, you will catch a short trolley from the gate to the main terminal, which houses all the shops, restaurants, baggage claim, and ground transportation. You will arrive in the main terminal on either the "Red" side or the "Blue" side, with all of the shops and the escalators to baggage claim and ground transportation being located more or less in the middle of the terminal.

If you arrive early on the day of your cruise, keep in mind that there isn't much point in getting to the terminal before about 11:30 am. Prior to that, the ship will be disembarking the incoming cruise and you won't be allowed in the terminal until that process finishes. Fortunately, Tampa International has some nice restaurants and bars you can visit while waiting. They also provide free internet WIFI, so if you have a laptop, you can play on the internet while you wait.

When it comes time to head to the port, there are several convenient transportation options. Whether you take a cab, limo or airport shuttle, the ride will take 20 - 25 minutes.

[Bay Shuttle \(813\) 259-9998](tel:8132599998). Exit either end of Baggage Claim (Red or Blue, which ever is closer to where you get your bags) and look for the glass booth that says "Bay Shuttle". On cruise days the shuttles are usually lined up at the airport ready to pick up

passengers, but if you don't see one of their large navy blue and yellow buses, you'll still only have to wait about 15 minutes before one arrives. The cost is \$11/person going to the port and \$9/person coming back. You are allowed 3 pieces of luggage per person.

Cab (Yellow Cab - (813) 253-0121; United Cab – (813) 253-2424). It doesn't really matter which cab company you choose, they both charge the same and they both come to the same place at the airport. The fee is \$22 per cab, and they'll add on extra miles if you want to make a stop along the way. The fee is for the cab, regardless of how many people, so you can save by having multiple passengers. Exit the Baggage Claim the same as if getting a shuttle. There will be a valet desk and the attendant will call up your cab for you. If you have a special request about your cab, such as you want one that allows smoking, tell the valet, he'll take care of it. We like the cabs for two reasons, even though they cost a little more.

1. They get going as soon as you get in, so you're not waiting for other passengers, and;
2. They will make a stop for you on the way to the port if you think of something that you forgot to pack, or if you had to leave some of your toiletries behind at the security desk when you checked in at your home airport because you didn't follow TSA rules on what you can bring on board in your carry-on luggage. (Yes, we have been down that road.)

As you might have guessed by now, we recommend tipping both the cab driver and the shuttle driver a couple of bucks, especially if they handle your bags, and double especially if you have several bags for them to handle.

If you fly into Tampa a day early, you can still stay at a "Park & Cruise" hotel, thereby using their shuttle service to get to the port the day of your cruise. When you get back from your cruise, just catch the Bay Shuttle back to the airport.

Some Final Points About Flying

When you pack for your cruise, you will probably be thinking about getting on the cruise ship. If you pack according to our suggestions above, your carry-on bag will therefore include items that are not allowed on airplanes, such as any amount of liquid or gel greater than 3.5 oz. (i.e., shampoo, toothpaste, etc.). And please note, it doesn't matter how much liquid or gel is actually in the containers, if the label says "4 oz", you can't take it with you. Also, any kind of scissors, nail files or such are not allowed.

So, we suggest that you keep your really valuable stuff (like electronics and travel documents) in a separate carry-on bag (we use a backpack for this) and check the bag that contains your toiletries and such. Otherwise, you're going to have to repack your stuff when you get off the airplane. Nah. If you do lose some of your toiletries at the airport security gate, be sure to get a cab when you leave the airport to go to the port and have the driver stop off at a local drugstore. It will only add a couple of bucks to your rate.

Also, the airlines now have a weight limit for all checked bags. If your bag weighs more than 50 pounds (and 51 is more than 50), you'll be charged an extra \$25 or you'll have to pull some stuff out of the bag.

Some Final Suggestions on Getting Ready To Go To Mexico

Prepare Your Stomach. For about a week before hitting Cozumel, eat at least one serving of yogurt every day, or take acidophilus supplements. It helps to build up the good bacteria that your digestive track needs to deal with any little bugs or impurities that you pick up. Some of the best food you'll find will be in small local establishments, or even roadside venues. The chow is really good, and authentically Mexican. But, the sanitation requirements in Mexico are not the same as in the US. Also, the normal diet for locals is different than what you may be used to. Your stomach may not be used to it all. The yogurt is an easy and effective way to build up your digestive immunity.

Yes, You Should Be Careful With The Water. Here again, it's not so much that the water isn't clean, it's more a case of what's in the clean water. In the US, public water systems use chlorine and a few other chemicals to rid the water of bacteria and other living impurities. But even with that, there are certain microbes that routinely inhabit our water. Your body has gotten used to that quality of water. In Mexico, the public water is also purified, but the systems they use can be vastly different. Consequently, the types of bacteria that are in the clean water may be different than what your body is used to. It won't kill you, and if you stay there long enough, your body will adapt just fine. But for short excursions into the country, it can cause gastric discomfort.

You may do just fine with the local water. And you don't have to worry about the ice that gets used in your drinks. But, if you travel outside of San Miguel, or the resort areas around the island, it becomes more important to monitor your water. We recommend that you take a couple of bottles of water per person when you go ashore, or buy bottled water on the island (it will cost a couple of dollars per bottle). The yogurt will help with this also.

Notify Your Bank That You Will Be In Cozumel. This will accomplish two things. 1) It will keep them from blocking charges that you make. Sometimes, banks will not allow charges to your account if they are "suspicious". If you've never been to Mexico, and all of a sudden a charge shows up for something, they may flag it. Letting them know in advance will save you the frustration of not being able to pay for something you want. 2) Also, when you tell them the dates of your trip, they will be on the lookout for any charges that occur AFTER you leave. It has been known to happen that credit card numbers are lifted from receipts and used illegally. Be sure to ALWAYS take the carbon copy if the vendor is using the old style credit card imprinter. If the credit card slip you are asked to sign is a printed one, check to see if your credit card number is displayed in full. If it is, black out everything but the last four digits before you sign it. (Most modern day credit card slips will have your card number displayed like this : "**** * 1234". This gives the vendor the last four digits, which is all the account info they need, without revealing the whole card number).

Convert Some Currency. Check with your bank and see if they charge you a fee to convert dollars to pesos. The current conversion rate is \$1 = 10.9 pesos. Almost everywhere you go will give you your bill in "pesos", not dollars, and it is surprising how few Mexicans know how to convert pesos to dollars (Uh huh). They will tell you that it is about "10 to 1" which is pretty close. If you stick with that, you will be paying an 8% surcharge on your purchase, which isn't that big a deal if you're only buying a beer. But if you're paying for a hefty bar tab and lunch for four, it can add up. Plus, it's really easy to miscalculate when doing the conversion, ESPECIALLY after you've had a few drinks. We paid \$42 once for a pitcher of Margaritas!

Sample Packing Check List

(Read the section "Before You Go", page 42)

We recommend that you use one large suitcase; one garment bag (if you need it) and one carry-on bag per person.

CARRY ON BAG: Valuables, travel documents, wallet, medicines or first aid products, toiletries, change of clothes & bathing suit, computer and any other electronics (MP3 Player, camera, etc), anything that you simply cannot do without.

LARGE SUITE CASE: All remaining clothing, personal items not required immediately (rain poncho/raincoat; small back pack or tote bag, extra pillow, bottle of wine or champagne, nonalcoholic beverages or bottled water, etc.)

GARMENT BAG (if needed): Any hang-up items, especially if you are bringing formal wear.

Documents	Clothes
Passport/Birth Certificate	Shoes
Cruise Packet (<i>fr Carnival or travel agent</i>)	- Sandals for poolside
Fun Pass (<i>from on-line registration</i>)	- Comfy walking shoes
	- Dress shoes for dining
Toys	Shorts (<i>3 pair</i>)
Camera	Casual Shirts/T-shirts (<i>3-4</i>)
Sunglasses	Swim Suit (<i>2 – so you can always have a dry one</i>)
MP3 Player	Underwear (<i>changes for 4 days</i>)
Alarm clock	Men – Slacks/shirts for Main Dining (<i>2 outfits</i>)
Leisure reading material	Ladies – Outfits for Main Dining (<i>2 outfits</i>)
Extra batteries for EVERYTHING	Formal Attire for Formal Night
	Socks
Sundries	Workout gear if you plan to use the gym
Air Freshener (<i>for cabin</i>)	Workout shoes if needed
Sun Screen	
Lip Balm (<i>SPF 30 or higher</i>)	
Bottles of water (<i>4-6 per person</i>)	Miscellaneous
Plastic bags (<i>for dirty/wet clothes</i>)	Extra clothes hangers
	Wind breaker, sweater or light jacket
Toiletries	Hats/visors
Hair Dryer	Basic first aid items
Eye drops	- pain reliever
Moisturizer	- band aids (assorted sizes)
Personal Hygiene	- Alka Seltzer or similar
Make-up	Sandwich bags
Vitamins/regular supplements	Power strip and extension cord.