

# New to cruising? Here's some free advice

By Dave Altman

Having just completed a cruise of the British Isles, I wanted to share some observations about cruise ships.

It was our first cruise in more than 15 years, when we enjoyed a wonderful cruise to Alaska. But here are a few observations after 12 days cruising around England, Ireland and Scotland.

Don't under pack — That's right, I said under pack, although most cruisers warn you not to 'over pack'. It's not just that the laundry rooms are small (like everything in Europe compared to the U.S.) it's just that they are nearly always crowded (unless you want to get up at 4 am before the other 3,599 passengers awaken). You can always have your laundry done with the ship, but at \$7 for a pair of jeans and \$3.50 for a golf shirt, you could almost afford another cruise. (Pack your Tide Sink Packs ... and your patience).

Get ready for unfamiliar noises — Let's face it, the sway of the ship is real. Now, I'm not talking about a sway that sends you reaching for the Dramamine tablets (or, patches) but the loud crack of waves as the ship collides with rough water. I am reminded of that announcement that airline pilots always make, "...folks we're experiencing a little rough air" while passengers are already banging their heads on the luggage bins. Cruise ship noises won't awaken you, but you might have trouble going to sleep trying to figure out what is causing them (remember the Titanic, when passengers kept on dancing while the engine room was filling with water?).

Purell stands everywhere — another (necessary?) inconvenience, post-Covid. This cruise line has a steward standing in front of the touchless Purell machines leading into the dining areas, 'reminding' passengers to wash their hands before going to dinner. Overkill? Probably, but who can logically be against clean hands on a cruise ship.

Lounges, lounges, everywhere — Not since the 80s have I seen so many lounges in one area. But it makes me wonder: are there that many heavy drinkers on cruise ships? Remember Leisure Suit Larry the Lounge Lizard? There are a lot of Larrys on cruises these days, except the 2023 version of Larry is now in his seventies, wearing Untucked Shirts, cargo pants and an Apple Watch.

Hallways to nowhere — You can get your 10,000 steps in daily by just trying to find your room. Not to mention, getting to the right bank of elevators! It's not that there are no elevators, it's that there are so many, you get turned around each time you jump on board. Cruise ship hallways are the narrowest walkways in civilization. I had to dodge the morning blue hairs (and Larrys) who were getting their workouts in just before a high carb lunch ("...more mashed potatoes, sir?").

Almost star singers — have you ever wondered what happened to those people who didn't get chosen to make

the trip to Hollywood on American Idol? Well, they appear to be performing on cruise ships. They are good for one song, maybe two, but trying to do Sinatra or Billy Joel or Dolly Parton, well, let's just say the dance floor never got crowded (buy hey, in the lounges anything goes, and the drinks keep coming ("I've got plenty of friends and the fun never ends, as long as I'm buyin'"). Forget the lounge, bring your Spotify playlist.

Ship announcements — maybe it's just me, but I don't want the ship's captain taking to the intercom several times a day to tell us where we are going (we already know where we are going, or we wouldn't be on the ship). I don't want him cracking jokes about how sorry he is to interrupt the lounge singers (honestly, I'd rather hear the American Idolwannabes). If the captain thinks he's Don Pardo, who's steering the ship ("what was that bump I heard, dear?")

Ship television — who goes on a cruise to watch TV? Apparently, lots of folks. All of those American TV shows from the sixties and seventies (like Love Boat) are on all day long with no commercials, so you can really settle in and enjoy those (maddening) laugh tracks. Just imagine: no CNN, no FOX News. Wait a minute, the more I think about it, those Love Boat episodes might be the best choice after all.

Silverbacks in the hot tub — I mean, really, how many White Russians does it take for perfect strangers—al grandfathers—to get into a hot tub together on the Lido Deck? Maybe they had a little vaping huddle before jumping in? With their well-fed grandkids doing cannonballs in the pool next door, these guys were really enjoying male bonding with laughs and unlit cigars (no smoking on the boat). What am I missing here?

Masking up — yes, people are still wearing them (and not just at the Flowery Branch Publix). I am always curious about why they feel they should wear them. Many cultures (certainly not ours in south Hall) that have been wearing masks for decades (I remember Hong Kong in 1998 when everyone on the elevator — except one American — had on masks, and that was 20 plus years before Covid).

Yes, not only do our Asian neighbors eat healthier than we do, but they also live longer. Wait a minute, are those two facts related? Holy French fries, Batman!

Seriously, folks, the cruise was terrific, so please ignore (most) of these warnings. Still, don't bring your bathing suit to the British Isles. No wonder all those Brits are really, really white.

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