

Best Cruises for Seniors by Cruise Critic

Editor's note: If you're looking for a more Euro-centric take on this story, you can read our U.K. version, [Best Cruises for U.K. Seniors](#).

What exactly is it that seniors want in a cruise?

We want a comfortable experience. We love to visit several ports without the hassles of having to pack and unpack at different hotels in different cities. And we want to be pampered a little bit more -- with good food and service, great entertainment and activities, and a good value for our vacation dollars.



Many of us look for stimulating enrichment programs as food for our minds and menus with healthy selections for our bodies. Despite popular notions, there are actually a slew of us seniors out there who aren't crotchety busy bodies; instead we like to be active, and we'd prefer to learn about the culture of the Asian port at which we are about to dock or take those salsa lessons before we actually land in Argentina.

Perhaps more so than the majority of travelers, some of us have accessibility issues. In this regard, ships built in the last half dozen years generally follow Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) recommendations for passengers with mobility problems (take a look at the following articles -- [Editor's Picks: Top Ships for Cruisers With Disabilities](#) and [At Your Service: Cruising With a Disability](#)). Some lines go the extra mile when it comes to accessibility; two examples are [Holland America](#)'s wheelchair-accessible tender transfer system and [Royal Caribbean](#)'s hydraulic pool chairs that enable passengers with mobility issues to use the swimming pool.

Whether it's because we have more time to travel and do so more often or because we have a fixed income to work with, many of us may have budget-related issues. If you would like to make the most of your available travel budget, always compare prices between economy-priced lines like [Carnival](#) and [Norwegian Cruise Line](#), and shop around for specials on such lines as [Royal Caribbean](#), [Celebrity](#) and [Holland America](#).

The following are a couple other things you may consider:

★ Reduce your onboard costs as much as possible. In order to avoid laundry charges, pack plenty of clothes. Bring your own camera and film, as opposed to buying photos onboard or a disposable camera from the ship shops. Do your homework on the ports of call and tour independently -- it could be cheaper than buying shore excursions for you and your companion.

★ Before booking, ask yourself what you are most looking forward to on your next cruise. Do you want to delve into an enrichment program? Are you looking forward to

some spa relaxation? Or are you looking to enjoy some spectacular dining? Whatever it is, a cruise that will suit your tastes and aspirations is out there.

★ Contact the cruise line to make sure that it offers any special services that you require. For instance, if you have accessibility issues, find out what exactly you will be able to participate in, especially if your ship doesn't actually dock at a certain port of if you are on a smaller ship.

★ Many cruise lines now offer healthy dining options, but if you are on a special diet, notify the cruise line or travel agent when you book your voyage. Generally, if notified three weeks or more in advance of your sailing, most cruise lines will be able to accommodate your special diet. When it comes to heart-healthy dining, many cruise lines, including [Crystal](#), Holland America, [Princess](#), [Celebrity](#), Royal Caribbean, [NCL](#) and [Carnival](#), offer low-fat selections on their menus (and lines like [Crystal](#) and Carnival feature low-carb selections, in case you are following Atkins and similar diets).

★ Participate in as many activities and enrichment programs as you wish, but don't be shy about dropping something if it turns out it is not to your liking. On a recent cruise, a friend of mine stayed frustrated throughout her language course, but she continued through several lessons before she finally dropped the course -- she could have saved herself some time and just dropped it after the first class.

★ If you are on a medication, bring an ample supply of it as the ship's doctor may not have it -- bring enough not only to last for the entire voyage, but for a week more, in case of travel delays. I was at the airport in Fairbanks on September 11, 2001, and we were not able to get a flight back home for six days. Two seniors in our group had to find a pharmacy and incur transportation costs to the drugstore and long-distance call charges to get refills for their prescriptions.

But with all these things to think about and all the cruise lines out there, what exactly is a good cruise line for us seniors?

Here are my favorite cruise lines -- representing a variety of price ranges -- for seniors. The choices are based on my experiences during my 130 sailings -- 34 of which I have enjoyed after my 55th birthday and more than a dozen of which I sailed on with my mother who was in her late 70's and early 80's at the time.

Crystal Cruises

Ships: All

Our Pick For: Best enrichment program

Which Seniors Would Feel at Home: If you appreciate sophistication, then you'll love this line's atmosphere -- the vast majority of men donned tuxedos during a [Crystal Serenity](#) Mediterranean voyage this summer.



Why Seniors Would Love This Line: You'll revel in the glamour of the line's six-star ships, but you'll also love the big-ship facilities that include a range of lounges including coffee/wine bar, cigar bar, piano bar, disco, nightclub, show lounge, cinema and casino. Food won't be an issue since all three ships offer gourmet cuisine (including low-fat and low-carb selections), themed teas and two alternative restaurants.

And along with your stomach's fill, your mind won't be starving either -- you can participate in enrichment programs in a dedicated classroom facility or take various courses ranging from Berlitz language lessons to Yamaha keyboard lessons. You won't even have to fork over any extra cash to take these.

Those Little Extras: You won't be bored with the top-notch entertainment, and if you are the only one in your travel group who wants to dance, then accept an invitation to dance with one of the social hosts who are there just for this circumstance. Crystal Serenity should be your ship of choice if you are looking for spa relaxation -- it has the line's best and largest spa facility.

Caveats: With the glamorous ambiance of these vessels, you won't want to book a cruise on this line if you aren't comfortable dressing up and mingling in sophisticated surroundings.

Price Range: \$\$\$\$\$\$ +

Celebrity Cruises

Ships: Millennium class

Our Pick For: Best premium line offering excellent value for your vacation dollar (tied with HAL).

Which Seniors Would Feel at Home: Middle- and upper-middle-class seniors who appreciate excellent cuisine and good service should definitely look into this cruise line.

Why Seniors Would Love This Line: With top-notch cuisine, you'll leave your plates empty -- particularly in the AquaSpa Cafe on Millennium-class vessels, where you'll find light fare for breakfast (7:30 a.m. to 10 a.m.) and lunch (noon to 3 p.m.) including delicious chilled strawberry soup, grilled salmon, chocolate chip cookies and cherry pie (yes! You read it right: delicious low-fat cookies and pies). While other Celebrity ships require a fee for the use of the thalassotherapy pool, the Millennium-class AquaSpa lets you enjoy these relaxing waters for free. After some relaxation, you can participate in Celebrity's enrichment program and series of celebrity lecturers that, in the past, have included actress Rita Moreno, actor Ernest Borgnine and broadcaster Sander Vanoucur.

Those Little Extras: As music lovers, another plus for my husband and me was Notes, the ship's music library. Other amenities include multi-million dollar art collections, a sushi cafe and nostalgic alternative restaurants with themes dedicated to the great liners of old -- think RMS Olympic or the SS Normandie.

Caveats: Seniors who are small-ship and adventure-travel devotees may wish to steer clear of the Millennium-class vessels and set course elsewhere -- perhaps to Celebrity Xpeditions, a sister line offering yacht-like sailings in the Galapagos and other exotic locales.

Price Range: \$\$\$\$+\$

Holland America Line

Ships: [Rotterdam](#), [Amsterdam](#) and the Statendam class

Our Pick For: Best premium line offering excellent value for your vacation dollar (tied with Celebrity)

Which Seniors Would Feel at Home: Seniors who enjoy such traditions as announcements of dinnertime with chimes by a uniformed steward and fresh flowers throughout the ship will love these vessels.

Why Seniors Would Love This Line: All of HAL's vessels feature one of the most expansive lido restaurants at sea (look for unexpected items like graham crackers, peanut butter and yogurt at lunch), along with a wonderful soup and salad bar. This year, HAL has incorporated the "As You Wish" dining program in its main dining rooms, so while you will still hear chimes ringing in the set dinner times, you can also choose to be flexible (either make your reservations that day or simply walk in for a seating at meal time). But HAL also offers the Pinnacle Grill, where you can enjoy a romantic ambience and fresh dishes paired with wine for a modest surcharge per guest.

An expanded enrichment program including culinary demonstrations and a Sidewalk Cafe/Exploration Center (inspired by European coffeehouses) are part of the line's Signature of Excellence enhancements. Touches like a complimentary canvas bag, free popcorn at the movies, and after-dinner coffee and hand-dipped chocolate in the Explorer's Lounge in the evenings make this line very popular with seniors.

Those Little Extras: Interiors are graced with a collection of art and antiques. Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and the Statendam-class vessels have a dedicated movie theater and self-service laundry rooms -- two features that are absent on the line's latest ships (on these, movies are instead shown in a lounge). And for the lovely ladies who can't wait to cut the rug but whose partners dig their heels into it, you'll find social hosts on sailings of 30 days or longer.

Caveats: Those looking for a vibrant night life may be disappointed -- many passengers choose to retire early.

Price Range: \$\$\$\$+\$

Royal Caribbean International

Ships: Voyager class

Our Pick For: Best ships for active seniors (tied with Princess)

Which Seniors Would Feel at Home: This is the line for active seniors who want an array of options, activity-filled days (everything from bingo to basketball tournaments), and a variety of nighttime entertainment including dancing, musical revues and ice skating shows.

Why Seniors Would Love This Line: If you are looking to stay active during your cruise, then this line will make sure you do. You can enjoy entertainment in the five-story theater, practice your swing in a golf simulator (or your putting on the miniature golf course) or even participate in some of the senior-focused fitness programs (like "walk a mile at your own pace" in which you can feel free to thoroughly beat the others who are walking at their own pace). On the other hand, if you want to do some relaxing, you can take advantage of expansive spa facilities. You will also have a variety of dining venues -- including a three-level dining room and for-fee restaurants (including Johnny Rockets) -- in which you can enjoy both healthy and tasty "Vitality" choices (including trans-fat-free foods and freshly prepared meals made from all-natural ingredients).

Those Little Extras: There is a rock climbing wall (I'm too chicken; so I just watch!), a rink for in-line skating (ditto!), a basketball court, expansive spa/solarium spaces, a "horizontal atrium" that looks a lot like my shopping mall at home and a multi-million dollar art collection.

Caveats: These vessels are huuuuuge! You will do considerable walking if you sail.

Price Range: \$\$\$\$ \$ +

Princess Cruises

Ships: Grand class, [Diamond Princess](#) and [Sapphire Princess](#)

Our Pick For: Best ship for active seniors (tied with Royal Caribbean)

Which Seniors Would Feel at Home: This line offers plenty for active seniors who want a variety of choices for day time and nighttime activities and enrichment programs.

Why Seniors Would Love This Line: Delicious food -- particularly the nightly pasta selections -- friendly and lively service, and great entertainment are a big draw. Anytime Dining allows people to dine wherever and whenever they like, but the line also offers traditional seatings. Affordable verandas are the mantra of this moderately-priced line, and it is a big pleasure to sip something tall and cool while drinking in the scenery of sea and ports in big gulps -- from the perch of your own private veranda. A good



enrichment program -- ScholarShip@Sea -- includes pottery, culinary arts, computer lectures, photography and more (the line offers an average of 20 courses per sailing), so if you desire to take back more than a suntan from your vacation, then this line may be ideal.

Those Little Extras: Many Princess ships feature Movies Under the Stars with a big, Times-Square-style poolside movie screen for viewing movies and special sporting events.

Caveats: Since these vessels are big, we do not recommend them for small-ship devotees.

Price Range: \$\$\$\$+\$

Cunard Line

Ships: All

Our Pick For: Best cruise line for ocean crossings

Which Seniors Would Feel at Home: Because of its British style, this line is just right for passengers who like a certain amount of formality and would like to experience a trans-Atlantic sailing.



Why Seniors Would Love This Line: Although [Queen Mary 2](#) used to be the biggest ship in the world, it is still an elegant -- though not overwhelmingly so -- trans-Atlantic vessel, which is able to provide such amenities as a planetarium at sea that presents excellent shows. You will also find plenty of enrichment opportunities with Cunard ConneXions, a seven-classroom complex that sets the scene for language classes, art lessons and enrichment lectures organized by the University of Oxford in England. Additionally, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in England feature several workshops and presentations.

Those Little Extras: The civilized British custom of afternoon tea is a not-to-be-missed occasion at sea with such goodies as fresh scones, strawberry jam, clotted cream and dainty cucumber sandwiches, as well as live music. This is another ship on which you won't have to sit out a dance -- dancing hosts twirl unescorted ladies on the dance floor.

Caveats: QM2 is a big, big, big vessel and may appear impersonal to solo travelers.

Price Range: \$\$\$\$+\$

Carnival Cruise Lines

Ships: Conquest class

Our Pick For: Best for seniors on a budget

Which Seniors Would Feel at Home: Active, fun-loving seniors will enjoy the ambience of this line.

Why Seniors Would Love This Line: Carnival offers a Vacation Guarantee (money-back guarantee if you are not satisfied) and AARP discount. As some of Carnival's biggest ships, the Conquest-class vessels have 22 lounges and bars, a steakhouse-style alternative restaurant and a two-level casual restaurant. The food is good, and the menus include low-fat and low-carb selections. The line also offers a variety of activities, including bingo, golf lessons, trivia contests, sing-along sessions and dance lessons -- boredom is usually left on the pier like a discarded lump.

Those Little Extras: Along with numerous activities in which you can participate, you can also enjoy one of the Vegas-style revues or indulge yourself at the spa. You'll also be glad to know that if you want to bring your grandchildren along, Camp Carnival is available to let you have some adult time as well.

Caveats: If you do not like a perennial party ambience or big ships, you may wish to seek elsewhere.

Price Range: \$\$\$\$+

Disney Cruise Line

Ships: All

Our Pick For: Best line for three-generational reunions at sea

Which Seniors Would Feel at Home: If you are traveling with grandkids, then you should definitely take a look at this line.

Why Seniors Would Love This Line: There are adults-only areas, including an evening entertainment district with clubs and an adults-only restaurant for parents and grandparents. Each night, passengers will travel to one of three family restaurants with their wait staff. The staff is friendly. The ships can dock at [Disney's](#) private island, Castaway Cay, thereby eliminating the need for tenders.

Those Little Extras: Cabin bathrooms are divided so two people can use them at the same time in privacy. Both of the Disney ships offer amenities and facilities for all ages - Mickey, Minnie and their pals are onboard. An expansive playroom and a variety of activities keep the younger set entertained.

Caveats: There are no casinos on the [Disney](#) ships, but there is bingo -- and of course,

if you don't like Disney or children, stay far away from this line.

Price Range: \$\$\$\$\$\$ +

Silversea Cruises

Ships: [Silver Shadow](#) and [Silver Whisper](#)

Our Pick For: Best ultra-deluxe small-ship cruise line for seniors

Which Seniors Would Feel at Home: Seasoned, affluent seniors will enjoy relaxing in the elegance of these ships.

Why Seniors Would Love This Line: These modern, ultra-deluxe, small, all-suite ships offer an excellent enrichment program featuring distinguished lecturers which may include university professors, ambassadors, journalists and chefs from the regions visited. Interiors are refined, service impeccable and cuisine gourmet. A Silversea Signature experience is an included shore side activity or event on many itineraries -- perhaps a visit to a glacier while in the Chilean fjords, a fiesta in a village in the Mexican Riviera or a concert in the ruins at Ephesus.

Those Little Extras: Silver Shadow and Silver Whisper are slightly larger than the line's two older ships and have such new features as a computer center and Le Champagne, a wine and Champagne bar.

Caveats: If you are accustomed to big ships, then you may feel confined on these smaller vessels. Also, if you'd rather not hob knob in sophisticated surroundings, this may not be the line for you.

Price Range: \$\$\$\$\$\$ +

Cruise West

Ships: All

Our Pick For: Best cruise line for soft-adventure itineraries

Which Seniors Would Feel at Home: If you like to explore the sea and land in comfort and casual surroundings, put this line at the top of your list.

Why Seniors Would Love This Line: [Cruise West](#)'s informal vessels offer casual, close-up opportunities for responsible exploration and enjoyment of scenery and wildlife in unspoiled coastal areas of the globe. The captain may guide the ship so close to a waterfall in Alaska or British Columbia that you will feel its mist on your face. You can even request to be awakened for wildlife sightings or other special nighttime occurrences, such as the Aurora Borealis while sailing in Alaska. Cultural and natural

experiences are featured -- you may experience a Tlingit folkloric show in Alaska or kayak off pristine beaches in Central America. Each night, the chef personally presents the menu, and naturalists interpret the wonders on the itinerary.

Those Little Extras: You can enjoy a small library with books and materials on the areas of the world you visit.

Caveats: Since the vessels have a small passenger count and sail on coastal itineraries, a doctor does not remain onboard during the cruise -- but at least one crew member is trained in first response. The exception is the ocean-going Spirit of Oceanus, which does carry a doctor onboard.

Price Range: \$\$\$\$+\$

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