



Top 10 Most Popular Large Ship Cruise Lines for Families

By: Linda Garrison

Cruises make wonderful family vacations. Large cruise ships cater to all ages and many offer interesting and/or educational age-specific children's programs. With over 60 cruise lines and almost 300 cruise ships to choose from, selecting the right cruise line for your family is often difficult. For most families, a large ship offers the greatest variety of activities.

1. Carnival Cruise Lines

Carnival Cruise Lines advertises itself as the "fun ships", and the cruise line has a variety of family-friendly amenities at its fleet-wide Camp Carnival. Carnival has scheduled onboard programs for ages 2 through 14, special shore excursions for teens, and even baby sitting (for a fee).

2. Celebrity Cruises

The Celebrity X-Club Youth Program offers family friendly cruising and activities for kids ages 3-17. Children can learn more about the world by exploring science and nature or just have fun participating in the wide variety of activities from talent shows to slumber parties. Celebrity offers in-room babysitting for a fee.

3. Costa Cruise Lines

Costa is the Italian branch of Carnival Corporation, and the ships are designed for both Europeans and North Americans. The year-round Costa Kids program offers daily activities for kids 3-17, and has youth counselors. Good choice for families who want their kids to interact with those from other countries.

4. Crystal Cruises

Crystal is a luxury line that offers a supervised children's program whenever a large enough group of children will be onboard (holidays, summer vacations, etc.) Grandparents and parents who prefer an upscale line, but who wish to take their kids (or grandkids) along might enjoy this sophisticated line. Crystal does not set the youth program activity schedule until the ship knows the ages and numbers of kids who will be sailing.

5. Cunard Line

Cunard Line's Queen Mary 2 and Queen Elizabeth 2 are two of the largest cruise ships afloat. They have a British flair for their children's programs, including real children's nurses and trained British nannies. The ships also have a teen center.

6. Disney Cruise Line

Anyone who loves Disneyworld or Disneyland will love Disney Cruises. The Disney characters entertain the kids on the ships, and there are numerous family activities. As such, the ships are much like a theme park at sea, and are geared towards family cruising. The ships have supervised children's programs year-round for ages 3 through teens.

7. Holland America Line

Holland America's Club HAL provides year-round supervised children's programs for ages 5-12. Some of the Holland America ships have programs for ages 3 through teens. The ships have daily activities and a "just for kids" shore excursion on its Half Moon Cay Caribbean island.

8. Norwegian Cruise Line

NCL's Kid's Crew program has a playroom staffed with youth coordinators year-round. Activities are scheduled when the ship is at sea and in port for kids ages 2-17. Fun things to do for kids include dancing, arts and crafts, treasure hunts, costume-making, and games.

9. Princess Cruises

Princess expanded its youth program in 2002 to provide age-specific activities for kids 3-17. The ships also include learning activities on science, wildlife, and conservation. Teens will enjoy many of the same things they love at home--Nintendo, movies, Karaoke, and giant screen TVs. Younger kids will find plenty to do in the youth center. Princess also has full-time youth coordinators and group babysitting.

10. Royal Caribbean International

Royal Caribbean International has big ships with non-stop activities for children. The ships have those famous rock-climbing walls and ice skating rinks. The RCI supervised year-round youth program, Adventure Ocean, is targeted to kids 3 to 17 in five age groups. It promises to be both fun and educational. Group babysitting is also available.

Questions to Ask When Planning a Family Cruise With Your Children

Cruises are perfect for multi-generational family vacations! Kids seem to love cruises, and many cruise lines have recognized the previously untapped market for families with children. Since cruises offer something for all ages, families can have fun together or

have fun with others of their peer group, all in one vacation spot. In addition, since almost all of the major costs of a cruise are included in the base price, it makes budgeting for a family easier. Your teenagers (or teen wanna-bes) can scan the menu looking for "the most expensive items" and be disappointed. There are no prices! They can eat what they want (and as much as they want) without a corresponding shrinkage of your wallet. Cruises are like a big "all-inclusive resort", except they move across the water, providing new vistas each day for the entire family.

Finding a cruise for adults is difficult enough, but finding a good match in a cruise for adults and children or teens involves some research and hard work. Most cruise lines allow children on board, but not all design activities specifically for kids.

Following are some basic questions you should ask your travel agent and/or find out from the cruise line when selecting a cruise for a family with children. In "More of this Feature", you'll find overviews of the kids' and teens' programs on some of the cruise lines. Be sure to check with your travel agent before booking to get the specifics on each cruise ship. Some ships have different age categories, and others don't offer their kids programs year-round.

Basics

- * What are the age restrictions for the cruise line?
- * Do my children's ages qualify them for a discount?
- * Does the Web site and/or brochure of the cruise line feature children in the pictures? (If not, it's probably not designed for kids.)
- * Are the special activities and child care/teen center available at the time we wish to cruise?
- * Will my children find the ports of call interesting? If not, is there enough to keep them happy on the ship?
- * Are discounts available for a 3rd and/or 4th person in our cabin?
- * If there a special place or playroom dedicated for children? For teens?

Cabins

- * Are cribs and/or day beds or cots available to put in our room? If so, is there a rental fee?

- * Are adjoining cabins available? (If you have a BIG or extended family)
- * How big are the cabins?
- * Are guardrails available for bunk beds?

Dining

- * Does the menu offer food my children will eat?
- * If not, are pizza and burgers and hot dogs and such available?
- * Is there a children's menu available for each meal?
- * Is early seating available or does the ship have "open" seating so that we can eat at a time close to when the children normally dine?

Activities

- * What activities are planned for children?
- * Is there a children's-only pool available on the ship?
- * Will there be special movies or live entertainment that children will enjoy?
- * Are there any shore excursions scheduled that are geared toward children?
- * Is there a babysitting service available?
- * What are the hours and costs for the babysitting service?

Child Care Center or Teen Center

- * What are the requirements for placing a child in the center such as age, vaccinations, or potty training?
- * How are the children's areas supervised? Is the teen center supervised?
- * What are the hours, costs, and restrictions on the centers?

- * What security methods are used when a child is picked up from the center?
- * What is the ratio of children to adult staff in the children's center?
- * How are the staff trained in the children's center? Do they know how to perform CPR on children and infants?
- * Are the staff working in the children's center insured?