



# Staying healthy while Cruising the Caribbean



## CRUISING IN THE CARIBBEAN

Over the past years cruising has become a much more popular option for the standard tourist with many individuals and couples, and also family groups, benefiting from the falling prices and the superb level of service which the major cruise liners are now offering. No longer is cruising seen as the haunt for only the mega rich!

## ALL AGE GROUPS

The age profile for the typical Caribbean cruise holiday varies from the older travellers (with their sticks, wheelchairs and zimmer frames!) through all the variation of the 'middle ages' and teenage years down to even the youngest of families with their infant toddlers and push chairs. The staff and facilities on the major liners are perfectly geared up not only to cope with the vast range of needs for their passengers but also to provide a suitable environment and varied programme so that expectations are met and that the vast majority of their travellers leave vowing to return for another cruise..

## THE SHIPS

The modern cruise liners are huge. Carrying anything between 2000 to over 4000 passengers is very common and the surprising thing is that generally you still don't feel 'claustrophobic'. It is rare that you will see the same people over and over again. Certainly there is plenty of opportunity to get away and relax without having to constantly have those unwanted conversations with other passengers. Also the major liners have a wide programme of activities for all the age groups, as mentioned previously, which can be used when the ship is sailing between the ports.

## DESTINATIONS & HEALTH

The Caribbean liners visit a large number of islands and this impacts on the tour options and the on-shore facilities available. This also may have an impact on health issues to which a passenger may be exposed and needs to be borne in mind when considering the recommended vaccines for the trip.

## GETTING THERE

For most people, travelling from Europe, this involves a long haul flight to the port of embarkation. There will be a degree of 'jet-lag' on arrival but actually travelling from East to West leads to less problems for most in comparison to the flight home. Arriving a day or two early will allow you ensure you start your cruise in the best state of health.

## PACKING A "FIRST AID KIT"

Travellers are always recommended to carry a small fairly basic first aid kit for any overseas trip. Usually this should include tablets for diarrhoea and nausea as well as a cream to treat insect bites. On a cruise this is not so important as the cruise liners will all have an extensive medical service which is available for their passengers. Nevertheless having some of the basic medications with you means it will be possible to sort out some of the simpler problems. However, having your own personal medical staff on constant call is quite comforting!

## SUN EXPOSURE & DEHYDRATION

The heat of the summer months in the Caribbean can be very significant and, especially for the unprepared Irish traveller, it is really important to limit any sun exposure - especially in the early part of the trip. This is probably the most common reason for having to visit the on-board medical services. Throughout the cruise drinking significant amounts of fluids (non-alcoholic!) and replacing the normal salts lost through perspiration is essential to lessen any effect of dehydration.

## STAYING HEALTHY

Even though the level of hygiene on board is usually excellent, and the level of food preparation exceeds much of what we have in European countries, there are a number of health issues which may impact on those travelling through the Caribbean.



## SAFETY ON BOARD

A cruise liner is a large vessel and keeping safe on board is an essential element for all concerned. However, with excessive alcohol (or down to pure messing while doing a "Titanic" impersonation!), it would be possible to fall over-board. Fortunately this is an extremely rare occurrence. For most travellers being on a cruise is just like being within a hotel anywhere throughout the world - it is just that this 'hotel' is moving from port to port! Generally these large vessels are very well designed so that the effect of a rolling sea is kept to a minimum. Occasionally with a wet deck it is possible to slip and twist an ankle so take care and move about carefully.



## FOOD & WATER BORNE ILLNESS - ON BOARD

One of the most common problems on a cruise is that there is a great variety of food is provided 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Many travellers feel they have to constantly eat! This can lead to quite uncomfortable abdominal problems in many of the passengers. Common sense is important and, after the first day or two, most passengers realise that they don't need to stuff themselves constantly as there will be more food tomorrow! However occasionally there may be a food borne outbreak which can spread very rapidly throughout the ship. This is fortunately quite rare but passengers should be sensible and eat well cooked foods and avoid anything too rich.



## FOOD & WATER BORNE ILLNESS - ON SHORE

Much more commonly travellers are exposed to poorly prepared foods while they are on shore. This is when that extra care is always needed and especially - in many locations - avoiding cold foods (lettuce and side salads). Perhaps even more importantly travellers are advised never to eat undercooked bivalve shell fish (mussels, oysters, clams etc) as these are frequently associated with quite horrible gastrointestinal illnesses.

## RESPIRATORY ILLNESSES

This is probably one of the bigger issues on a cruise liner. If you are close to an individual who is coughing and sneezing it would be wise to move away a suitable distance. Also use one of the hand sanitising gels regularly and especially before and after meals.



## INSECT BITES & MALARIA RISKS

The actual risk of contracting malaria within the Caribbean is limited to the islands of Haiti and Dominican Republic. Even then, for most people, the risks are small and, occasionally, depending on the actual itinerary, the vaccination doctor may just recommend suitable repellents rather than actually having to take malaria tablets.



## VACCINATIONS & HEALTH CARE

Even though the cruise liners themselves have extremely high standards most travellers to the Caribbean are encouraged to consider having vaccines to help protect against illnesses which they may be exposed to while on shore. Having good repellents and sun block is also important for just about all travellers See <https://secure.travelshop.ie/>

## TMB ADVICE LINE

TMB seeks to provide a 24/7 emergency advice service for our registered patients via <http://tmb.exodus.ie/contact.asp> or phone our emergency on call number +353-86-0728999

National Travel Vaccine Appointment Tel 1-850-48 76 74

Web Address: [www.tmb.ie](http://www.tmb.ie)

This leaflet has been prepared using information supplied from WHO, the Center for Disease Control (US) and other international sources.

- ✓ Travel Accessories *CruisingCaribbean/TMB/20thOct09*
- ✓ Tropical Diagnostic Laboratory
- ✓ Tropical Disease Screening Centre
- ✓ W.H.O. registered Yellow Fever Vaccination Centre
- ✓ International Vaccination and Malaria Advice Centres

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Bray  
Carlow  
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Cork  
Dun Laoghaire  
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