Hi there!

Thanks so much for downloading my free guide, *Is “Upgrading” to Luxury Cruising Worth It?*. I put this guide together because I truly believe that travelers deserve to get the most value out of their vacation dollars. One of the ways to do this is to explore Luxury Cruising and all the special features that it has.

Plus, as a group travel specialist, I’ve found that groups can also explore many special places on a Luxury Cruise that are not available to them on the Mass Market Cruise Lines. That’s powerful stuff! In this guide, you’ll find that Luxury Cruising can compare in cost to the Mass Market Cruise Lines once you look at the total cost of both types of cruising.

Happy travels,

— Randy

**Is “Upgrading” to Luxury Cruising Worth It?**

Cruising offers so many benefits—you get to explore the world and relax all at once, as your crew sails you to spectacular destinations. Many cruisers get started on “mass market” cruise lines like Royal Caribbean or Carnival, but there are far more luxurious—and value-packed—options out there.

If you’ve dipped your toe into cruising and are wondering if it’s really worth it to trade in the mass market cruise experience for a more upscale line, keep reading. We’ll look at actual costs and amenity comparisons—and you may be surprised at how affordable a “luxury” cruise can be!

**The Mass Market Cruise Myth**

Mass market cruises often promote themselves as a value-conscious choice—but are they really the best value for your money? It depends on the experience you’re seeking, for sure. Because they are trying to attract those who haven’t been cruisers before, they try to keep the price as low as possible. But if you read the fine print, you’ll notice that they’re advertising the price of inside cabins (a.k.a. cruise cabins without windows or a view). If you’d actually like to see the ocean on your cruise, you’ll need to upgrade to a balcony or suite.

Mass market cruises also advertise lower base prices but then charge extra for many on-board amenities and experiences. You may think a cruise is all-inclusive, but that’s rarely the case in the mass market category. You’ll pay extra for drinks packages, excursions, and specialty restaurants. It’s possible to save money by opting out of these, but for lots of cruisers who want to take full advantage of being on vacation, they’re integral to the cruising experience.

While you could turn down, say, the drinks package, one extra cost you’ll need to definitely factor into your mass market cruise is gratuities. Most cruise lines charge between $11.50 and $18.50 per day per person for gratuities, and this is one of the main ways that many of the staff get paid. Gratuities will automatically be charged to your credit card at the end of the cruise (unless you feel your service has been sub-standard, and then you could ask for the charges to be refunded).

One common criticism of cruising is that it often feels like you’re being nickel and dimed on board. While that’s certainly not the case on all cruise lines (more on that in a moment!), you could feel the pinch on board a mass market cruise for sure.

**Luxury Cruising = Greater Value**

If you took a look at the base price of a premium and luxury cruise line, you’d think it was way more expensive than a mass market cruise. But many luxury cruises roll all of those “extra costs” into their base price. That means, if you’re typically the type to add “extras” to your cruise like drinks and excursions, a luxury cruise might not cost much more than a mass market one—but it’ll come with a major upgrade in quality of service!

Let’s take a look at actual numbers to see what the cost difference between mass market and luxury really is. Below, I’m comparing two similar itineraries on the mass market Royal Caribbean Cruise Line and the luxury Seabourn Cruise Line. Both cruises are in the last two weeks of November 2022 and go to the Eastern Caribbean; they visit comparable (but not identical) ports.

​Here’s how it breaks down:

**Comparison: Mass Market Vs. Premium by the Numbers**



Some things that you should notice:

* The differences in the Passenger/Staff Ratio. The luxury cruise line has close to a 1:1 Ratio, which should give you a much higher level of service.
* Both Cruises have 6 ports of call, but the luxury cruise line has two extra days at sea.
* Many of the extras are included in the luxury cruise at no additional cost—including gratuities, drinks, and specialty restaurants. No need to keep a running tally in your head of what you’ve spent!
* Notice the major difference in the number of passengers—the mass market cruise has more than 5 times the passengers as the luxury cruise. The luxury cruise gives you a far more intimate, uncrowded experience on board.
* That difference in passengers also indicates a difference in the ships; the luxury line’s ship will be smaller and more nimble, allowing you to dock in ports the much larger mass market ship can’t access. And when you stroll off the luxury ship, the port won’t be inundated with thousands of tourists at once, so you’ll get a more authentic experience as well!
* The price of a suite is almost the same, with a much higher level of service and more days on your cruise.

In most cases, it definitely makes sense to opt for a luxury cruise—it’s a minimal upgrade in cost, but a major upgrade in service, amenities, and overall experience.

The one scenario in which I’d caution against choosing a luxury line is if you’re traveling with small children; mass market cruise lines are usually more welcoming to small kids (though I highly recommend the Disney Cruise Line, which offers a bit more of an upscale cruise experience with all the magic needed to keep younger kids entertained). If you’re traveling with older children, young adults, or older relatives, a luxury cruise is an excellent vacation choice. It’s easy for everyone to “do their own thing” during the day, whether that’s exploring the ports or relaxing on board. Then you can gather together each evening to share stories and make memories!

**Randy’s Favorite Luxury Ocean Cruise Lines**

If you’re now thinking that a luxury cruise is right for you, the next question is: which one? There are so many to choose from, but as a cruising specialist I have a few favorites to share with you:

*Celebrity Cruise Line*: This is a great introduction to luxury cruising to travelers who are more used to mass market cruises.

*​Oceania Cruises*: A step up from Celebrity, Oceania is known for their smaller, more intimate ships. They are also known for their find cuisine.

*Azamara*: The most luxurious of these three lines, Azamara offers a more inclusive experience and immersive excursions.

**Randy’s Favorite Luxury River Cruise Lines**

If you’re an ocean cruising fanatic, consider switching things up and trying a river cruise next. River cruising offers a relaxed way to immerse yourself more deeply in a destination, as river cruise ships sail you right through a continent’s most storied landscapes. You dock right in the heart of your destination, so you can simply stroll off your ship and start discovering! Ships are small and nimble, often capping at just 120 passengers, so you get to enjoy an even more uncrowded experience.

Here are two of my top choices for a luxurious river cruise experience:

*Avalon Waterways*: This river cruise line gives you fantastic views with “panoramic” suites that are 30 percent larger than the industry standard.

*AmaWaterways*: This fantastic line offers many specialty cruising options themed around food, wine, Christmas markets, golf, classical music, and more.

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About RWM Travel: Through my full-service travel agency, I help travelers embark on effortless cruising vacations inspired by their passions. With so many cruise lines and itineraries to choose from, I use my deep knowledge of the luxury cruising industry to match my clients to the cruise experience sure to thrill them.