

CRUISE NEWS
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CHOOSING THE PERFECT STATEROOM

A good friend recently e-mailed me asking my opinion on cabin locations for an upcoming cruise. As a past passenger on this ship, I still had my deck plan and with that in hand, gave him my thoughts. Checking out a cabin's location in reference to other parts of a ship is a great idea. Sometimes, though, you just can't prepare for the unexpected.

On a Panama Canal cruise on Celebrity's *Galaxy*, we thought our cabin was ideally located until our first morning at sea. Promptly at 8 am we awoke to heavy thuds on our ceiling. After 20 minutes, we contacted the front desk and learned that the portion of the salon was being used by the step-aerobics class and would continue daily throughout the cruise. If this had been a shorter voyage, we would have tried to deal with it; since we were on a 12-day trip, we persevered. Interestingly, the front desk's first question was "Who did you book with?" When we told them Celebrity, they were able to find us another comparable cabin on an upper deck.

On another cruise with Carnival, we booked a nice mid-ship location on the deck below part of the dining room. What the ship's layout didn't show was the galley and we were directly below it. At 2 am the first night out, we heard the sounds of heavy wheels (a cart perhaps?) constantly rolling across the ceiling. The Purser's Desk told us that work in the kitchens included continuous cleaning and food service preparations. Again the question, "Who did you book with?" It was directly with Carnival. We were moved to a similar cabin away from the galley and the rest of the cruise was great.

Sometimes your cabin mate may be a little more sensitive to noises than yourself. In our case, it is husband Mike. Years ago on a Holland America cruise, he complained early on about the creaking sounds in the cabin. I didn't realize how much it bothered him until the next afternoon when I returned from a spa appointment. Our cabin had hundreds of bits of paper stuffed into various parts of the ceiling panels where he thought the 'creaks' were originating. It looked like the Wailing Wall. I have to admit it did cut down on the noise, but our cabin steward seemed a little distant after that.

On a Canada-New England cruise, we kept hearing a mysterious scraping noise, followed by a soft clang occurring around 2 and 3 am and lasting for hours. The front desk was baffled and the source of the sounds could not be found. A few nights later, I awoke from a deep sleep, startled by bright lights in our cabin. (I should add that I sleep with ear plugs.) Standing next to our bed were a uniformed officer, two maintenance guys and husband Mike—all with their ears pressed to the wall, listening intently. Apparently, my cabin-mate heard the noise and called the front desk—he didn't want to wake me. When the shock of having three strange men in your cabin (make that four if you count Mike) wore off, I realized they had found the cause of the noise—routine repairs and maintenance two decks below. The next day we were moved to a comparable cabin on an upper deck away from the noise.

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Sometimes it's the view that's compromised. A couple of times our ocean view stateroom was partially obstructed by the bottoms of lifeboats. Once on a Hawaii cruise on the *U.S.S. Constitution* (the same ship Grace Kelly sailed on from America to Monaco to marry Prince Rainier), the cabin, located under the bridge, promised panoramic sights of the islands. What the brochure didn't mention was that black out drapes had to be in place between dusk and dawn to avoid distractions to navigations. We probably missed a few sunrises and sunsets from our cabin, but hey, it was Hawaii and there was more than enough scenery to enjoy.

When we cruise we like to know exactly which cabin we'll be in. We used to book a guaranteed category with the possibility of an upgrade. That was until we were 'upgraded' to a forward stateroom close to the bow. When we encountered rough seas, we had to leave the room to avoid getting queasy.

Something to consider when booking a cruise is the location of the disco and casino which can be going strong well after 2 am on some ships. Unless you're likely to be closing down one or the other, you may want to avoid them. Likewise, elevators and stairs can be noisy. On the other hand, if walking and stairs are a problem, you may want to be near elevators for convenience.

If you do encounter a problem on your cruise, talk with the Purser or cabin steward to see if a solution can be found. They really do listen and want your vacation experience to be the best in every way. And it's always a good idea to bring along a box of ear plugs.

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