



The Basics

## How to take a free cruise

Would you like an all-expenses-paid vacation? Try working as a shipboard lecturer or stepping in as a 'gentleman host' for female passengers in need of a dance partner.

By [Kiplinger's Personal Finance Magazine](#)

Want to go on a free luxury-ship cruise?

If you have some area of expertise, you could follow the course taken by John Hall, 72, of Shreveport, La., who is a retired Louisiana State University professor of anthropology and geology. He provides passengers with lectures on the characteristics of the destination. In return, he gets a vacation at no cost.

Hall and one guest, usually his wife, Carol Ann, who operates the PowerPoint presentations, receive a free cabin and meals, and get to enjoy most shipboard amenities. Since 2002, Hall figures, he's taken one or two cruises a year, including trips to the Caribbean, the Panama Canal and Alaska. During the Alaska cruise, he spoke about glaciers and the Klondike gold rush.

"I talk once a day when the ship's at sea," he says.

**Unlike Hall, who specializes in destination talks, Cynthia Barnett provides self-help advice. Barnett became a cruise regular soon after she retired in 2003 at age 60 as a schoolteacher in Norwalk, Conn. During a typical one-week cruise, Barnett gives four talks, each a variation of what she calls "refire, don't retire." Barnett describes these presentations as "a great way to get a free vacation. On some cruises, I've taken family members as my guests."**

### **Retirees are often favored**

Shipboard talks and activities are part of the at-sea ambience that makes each hour of every day akin to summer camp. Retirees such as Hall and Barnett keep passengers busy with lectures to attend, games to play and skills to learn. If you are proficient at bridge, crafts, computers, crossword puzzles or zoology, there could be a place for you on board.

Cruise lines such as Carnival, Cunard, Holland America and Norwegian offer work-vacation gigs. "They often favor retirees," says Allan Jordan, a New York City travel consultant. "They're more predictable since they do not have another job."

To find a job, you can contact the entertainment departments of any of the 25 cruise companies that are members of the [Cruise Lines International Association](#). You can also get in touch with agencies that specialize in placing speakers and workshop facilitators on cruise ships: [To Sea with Z](#), [Sixth Star Entertainment & Marketing](#) and [Compass Speakers and Entertainment](#).

There is no standard arrangement between cruise ships and program providers, so find out ahead of time what your responsibilities and living conditions would be. Jordan says the room is always a double, so the speaker can bring a guest. Some cruise ships even pay small per-diem stipends, he says.

At Sixth Star Entertainment, executive Paul DiFilippi provides each staffer with a letter that outlines the cruise ship's do's and don'ts. "Staff members are expected to mingle with guests, to promote their programs and, on some ships, to host tables in the dining room," he says. Staffers pay the same rate as passengers for shore excursions.

Talks often relate to topics of current interest, such as identity theft, says Diane Zammel, the president of To Sea with Z. Proof of expertise is essential, she says. To be accepted as a bridge director, for example, an applicant must be certified by the American Contract Bridge League, she says.

### **Dance your way to a vacation**

Many cruise lines also recruit "gentleman hosts," single men ages 40 to 70 who conduct dance classes and serve as dance partners for single, divorced and widowed female passengers. One caveat: The men must sign an agreement specifying that they won't get romantically involved with the guests.

- **Video:** [The best way to get away](#)

Jeff Davidson, a management consultant who lives in Chapel Hill, N.C., conducts two to seven lectures on a typical one- to two-week cruise. He says applicants must convince the cruise ships of their knowledge and presentation skills. He advises a hopeful to assemble a sales kit consisting of a CD or DVD, letters of recommendation on speaking skills and a résumé demonstrating expertise that a cruise ship would want.

*This article was reported and written by Robert K. Otterbourg for Kiplinger's Personal Finance Magazine.*

**Published Nov. 13, 2007**