

Avoiding Seasickness



Seasickness is hardly fatal, but with symptoms such as nausea, stomach cramps and vomiting, it can certainly put a damper on your cruise fun. Motion sickness is thought to be caused by the visual disorientation resulting from being on an object in motion (ship) competing against our body's natural inclination for balance. Whatever the technical cause, the majority of cruisers are familiar with how rough, rocking seas can leave us feeling less than our best.

Mal de mer, however, is not caused by choppy waters alone. Scientific studies have shown that some folks become seasick by suggestion. They simply convince themselves that being on a ship will make them ill. On the other hand, for those who can forget about it, it's often smooth sailing.

Some people have a genuine proclivity for motion sickness and will undoubtedly suffer more during rough seas. According to medical professionals, seasickness is more prevalent in children and women. On the other hand, children under 2 seem to be immune from the ailment. Of equally interesting note, elderly people are less susceptible.

If you have a propensity to motion sickness or are concerned that you might develop symptoms, arm yourself with preventive measures beforehand.

Remedies That include Drugs

One of the most widely recommended remedies is Transderm Scop, a scopolamine patch applied behind the ear at least eight hours before exposure, with effectiveness for up to three days. Available only by prescription, the Scop is preventive, not a treatment, and can cause possible side effects such as dry mouth, blurry vision, drowsiness and dizziness.

Over-the-counter drugs used to deter and/or treat mal de mer include Dramamine, Meclizine (common name Bonine) or diphenhydramine (commonly known as Benadryl). On some ships these are dispensed freely. They are also sold in the sundries shop. Remember that the most common side effect of taking Bonine and Benadryl is drowsiness, and alcohol will exacerbate this.

Please note: For kids, less potent versions of both Benadryl and Bonine are available as well. Of course, we recommend that you talk with your doctor before giving your children any new medications.

Stronger, more effective prescription drugs can only be obtained from a physician (the ship's doctor can fix you up, but it often costs you the price of an office visit plus the pills, so you're better off going through your personal physician). These include Promethazine and ephedrine, which when taken together produce quick results as well as potential side effects such as sleepiness. Another option is suppositories, administered by the ship's physician, which work magic for some people.

Worst case scenario the doctors physicians can administer an injection that is a highly effective cure for most people for sea sickness, however this is at a cost, typically around \$150 NZD (costs vary from line to line). This can be a small amount however to save your vacation.



Needles not your thing? Try some of the drug free options listed below:

Drug-Free Remedies

If you don't like to take drugs, there are plenty of other options, if the numerous Cruise Critic boards' threads on seasickness remedies are any indication. Some swear by applying a Sea-Band wristband the minute you embark. The easy-to-wear, acupressure-inspired product has a plastic bead that presses against the Nei-Kuan pressure point located on the palm side of the wrist. This has certainly worked for me in the past. Efficacious in curbing nausea and vomiting without any side effects, it comes in both adult and children's sizes and can even be used by pregnant women. Sea-Bands are available without a prescription at major drug stores.

Others faithfully promote the benefits of ginger, which studies have found alleviates nausea associated with motion sickness. The root can be taken in various forms, including powder, tea, pill and candy. Some swear that eating green apples helps with nausea, and some ships offer plates of green apples and crackers on their room service menus.



A Few More Tips



To acclimate yourself to shipboard life, it's advisable to spend as much time as possible out on deck, using the horizon as a point to maintain your equilibrium.

Booking an outside cabin in the middle of the ship -- the natural balance point -- is another option. Having a window will also give you a consistent view of the horizon point (unless you find yourself in stormy waters, sea spume splashing against your window).

It's also not a bad idea to take only port intensive cruises with fewer days on the open seas and to avoid itineraries where the ocean is bound to be rough such as North Atlantic crossings or the Caribbean during hurricane season.

Hurricane season officially runs from **June 1** through **November 30**. Although hurricanes are generally unpredictable, conventional wisdom has dictated that peak season varies by geography. In the Eastern Caribbean and along the U.S. East Coast, the season tends to be busiest between mid-August and mid-September.

Another wise option is to pick large, modern ships -- not a difficult proposition with the industry trending toward larger ships. Anyone who's sailed on a relatively new mega-ship, perhaps of 100,000-tons or more, knows that stabilizers are used when needed to provide the smoothest ride possible.

If sailing Alaska If you are going to run into **choppy seas**, it's more likely to be in the open waters of the Gulf of Alaska than in the largely protected stretch of the Inside Passage. If you're concerned, book a northbound cruise if sailing a one way itinerary, so you'll cruise the Gulf at the end of the trip when you have your sea legs. If you get seasick easily, also think twice about roundtrip cruises from Seattle that spend two days cruising in the open ocean. A Vancouver return inside passage is probably the best Alaskan cruise for someone really worried about rough seas.

Remember that everyone reacts differently to the various remedies out there. It's on the cruiser to take part in a little research and self-experimentation

Safe Sailing, and may all your seas be calm!