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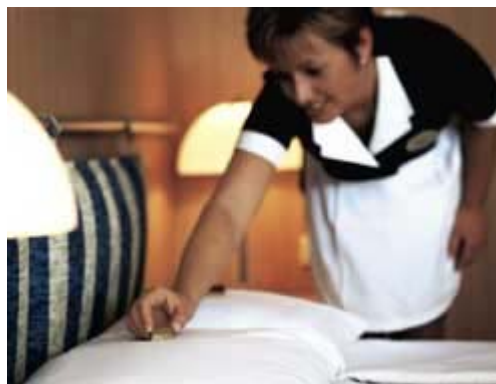
[Home](#) > [Features](#) > [An Insider's Guide to Cruise Tipping](#)

An Insider's Guide to Cruise Tipping

"No tipping required." "Gratuities included." "Service charge added to shipboard account." "Envelopes and tipping guides available at the Information Center."

There is probably no topic more discussed onboard among novice cruisers and old salts alike than tipping: when to tip, how much to tip, whom to tip. Having sailed on 80 or more cruises over 40 years, let me weigh in on the discussion.

First of all, it's important to understand that, technically speaking, no tip is ever required. A tip is a voluntary expression of thanks. The gratuities distributed onboard the modern cruise ship, however, are not just tips. Most cruise lines do not pay the men and women who serve their passengers a living wage. They pass on to passengers the obligation of supporting their employees and their families. Stewards are dependent for their livelihood on the generosity of travelers.



Part of the difficulty with tipping is the English language. Where other tongues have two words for tip, English has only one. The French draw a distinction between service and *pourboire*. The first is the unavoidable cost of being waited on; the second is an expression of thanks for exemplary service.

It is only in recent years that cruise lines have begun placing service charges on shipboard accounts. They did this for two reasons. The first reason was the rising number of continental Europeans traveling on cruise ships. Europeans are accustomed to having a service charge added to their bills at first-class hotels. It is not in their culture to tip further. Likewise, it is not the custom in Japan to tip at all. As cruise lines attracted passengers from countries where tipping is not customary, they added service charges to guarantee their employees' compensation.

The second reason for the service charge was the proliferation of alternative dining venues in recent years. In the days of the ocean liner, passengers dined at the same table each day for three meals and tipped their assigned stewards, busboys and table captains. With programs like "Personal Choice Dining" and "Freestyle Cruising," passengers are no longer tied to one team of stewards. In the course of a seven-day cruise they may dine in five or more restaurants, and be served by a dozen or more stewards. Because it is impractical for passengers to tip on each occasion -- and cruise lines have touted the advantages of cashless cruising -- the lines implemented service charges.

If you ask at the Purser's Office or Information Center whether the service charge replaces

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traditional tipping, the answer you will receive is "yes." But it is anyone's guess just how much of the daily charge on your account will go to a particular steward or waiter. Tips are distributed on a schedule that includes those who previously went unrewarded like the servers in the Lido restaurant where most passengers eat their breakfast and lunch. To accomplish the admirable task of compensating the overlooked steward without causing undue complaint from passengers, the amount given to dining room and room stewards is less under this scheme than it was previously. I know this, because I have asked stewards who have served under both systems. The top cabin and dining room stewards made out better before.

Because tips are technically voluntary, many cruise lines allow passengers to opt out of the service charge and to tip by themselves. The chief reason for this, according to fellow cruisers, is that they consider them too high. These cruisers invariably tell me they will tip the persons who serve them, and save money to boot.

It is impossible to tip all the persons in front of and behind the scenes whose efforts enhance passengers' shipboard experience. Dining room stewards often take turns in the Lido restaurant, serve bouillon on deck, serve tea in the lounge and attend the midnight buffet. Does anyone tip the steward who serves him/her tea in the afternoon? I never have, and I don't know anyone else who has either. The exception would be passengers who take their tea in lounges restricted to occupants of suites, who are served daily by the same steward.

The service charge is here to stay, and it is a fair attempt to compensate employees and to allow passengers increased mobility among bars and restaurants. Consider it a hidden cost of the cruise -- like port charges and government fees. It allows the cruise line to keep fares low by shifting part of their costs to the passenger. When considering a cruise, add the cost of gratuities that will be charged to your shipboard account when you plan your budget.

The guide that appears below, then, is not for tips as service, but for tips as *pourboire*. In all my years of cruising I can recall only once having received anything less than deft, professional service from shipboard service personnel, and I consider it a privilege to be able to thank them in a way they appreciate.

How to tip

It is customary to tip cabin stewards and butlers, dining room stewards, busboys and table captains on the last night of the cruise. Alas, I have been present when table mates have not shown up that night to avoid giving tips. I have answered stewards' anxious queries about the whereabouts of shipboard acquaintances and seen their chagrin. Consequently, cruise lines that do not have service charges often close alternative dining rooms on the last night of the cruise.

On some ships, envelopes for gratuities are left in the cabin. On others you can pick them up from a display at the Purser's Office or Information Center. On others still you must ask for them. While envelopes are certainly the way to go in giving most tips, it is much nicer to use your own. I always bring a supply of gift enclosure envelopes, available from stationers. These are smaller than the envelopes provided by cruise lines and can more easily be palmed to the recipient during a handshake. I always write thank you on the envelope, include my cabin or table number and sitting and sign my name. I want my stewards to know who tipped them and how much.

I have seen advice to the effect that it is permissible to leave a cabin steward's tip on the pillow when leaving for dinner the last night of a cruise. That is a custom whose time has passed. Today cabin stewards are assisted by helpers who do the heavy cleaning. These personnel are tipped in their turn by the stewards out of what they receive. It is not a good idea to tempt cleaners by leaving money in plain sight. It is better to hand an envelope to the steward, even if that means waiting for him or her.

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When to Tip

The cabin steward and butler, the dining room stewards, and busboy and table captain are tipped on the last night of the cruise. But there are exceptions to this rule. If you plan to do a lot of entertaining in your cabin, or if there is an infant or someone who is ill in your party, you will require extra service from your cabin steward. It is a good idea to give him/her a portion of his/her tip at the beginning of the cruise. You will be surprised how obliging that will make him/her.

On ships on which I am a regular passenger and am known by the crew I tip bartenders on the last night of the voyage, using an envelope. On certain ships I choose my bar by the bartender. If a bartender remembers me from previous sailings, knows my drink and asks for my family by name, I know he/she keeps a record book of regular passengers. The cruise line will have provided the names of returning passengers to the crew. A good crew member will have gone over the list, compared it with his/her record book and be prepared for my arrival. These members of the crew are worth their weight in gold; I reward them accordingly.

I recently cruised on a ship in which I did not care to return to the table to which I had been assigned. I dined half the remaining nights in the alternative restaurant and the other half in the dining room. For four nights the dining room maitre d' obliged with a window table for two. Knowing I would be back with the same request, I tipped him each time he produced a table. He always feigned embarrassment, but he never failed to have a table waiting. Because I had different waiters each night, I tipped them each night in cash. Instead of a waiter thinking he/she had an additional table to serve and one that would not produce revenue, I had, as word spread, happy, cooperative stewards.

Whom to Tip and How Much

For the following guidelines I am going to assume that there is a service charge added to the daily account and that passengers will pay it and not opt out. These, then, are *pourboires* for exemplary service.

Cabin Stewards

I tip cabin stewards \$5/night, whether I occupy a cabin by myself or share it with another. It is the same amount I give to the maid in a good hotel.

Room Service Stewards

I tip room service stewards \$2/visit. It is no easier to deliver for one than for two, so the tip would be the same for two persons. Tip in cash each time he/she comes.

Deck Stewards

I tip deck stewards on those (very few) ships that have reserved deck chairs \$2/day in an envelope on the last day of the cruise. These are the stewards who tuck me in with a steamer blanket, provide me with bouillon or tea and move my chair to the sun or shade, as I wish.

Maitre d's and Table Captains

I usually do not tip the maitre d'. The only service he/she provides is assigning a table. If I like my assigned table, there is nothing he or she can do further. Unless it were an occasion like the one I describe earlier and I want a (very scarce) window table for two, I would assume it to be part of the maitre d's job to move me to a more congenial table. Another reason for not tipping the maitre d' is he/she is a ship's officer and is paid accordingly.

On the other hand, I tip table captains \$1 for each night I am in the dining room, even if he/she has done nothing more than to greet me. The table captain supervises the stewards and busboys, and

much of what he/she does is behind the scenes. If, however, the table captain has promoted ordering off menu or prepared special dishes tableside or provided a cake for a special occasion, I would add an additional \$5/person per service.

Dining Room Stewards

I tip dining room stewards \$5 for each night I am in the dining room. If I dine in an alternative restaurant, I tip the waiter \$5 in cash on top of the service charge. Dining room stewards usually work in teams of two. I allow the team in an alternative restaurant to divide my tip as they choose. In the main dining room, I divide my tip between waiters (equal amounts) or between waiter and busboy (2/3, 1/3), and put each one's name on an envelope.

Bartenders

If I know the bartender from a previous cruise and drink regularly in his/her bar, I give him/her an envelope on the last night of the cruise. On some ships bartenders give me complimentary drinks -- they know they will be remembered later. When that happens, I double the tip. The bartender has given away the ship's liquor, which costs him/her nothing, and I have saved money on my bar bill; we split the reward. I give my regular bartender \$5 day.

If I go to different bars, I leave \$1 per drink with the bill -- even if there's already an automatic gratuity. When I am served hors d'oeuvres nightly by the same steward, I give him/her \$5 on the last night of a one week cruise. If I have been served by different stewards each night, I do not tip them.

Wine Stewards

If the wine steward has done nothing more than produce and pour the wine I have ordered, I tip him \$10 for a one week cruise. If, however, he/she has recommended wines, kept bottles from meal to meal (and from dinner to lunch, a nice touch) or has decanted wines I have brought to the dining room, I tip \$5/bottle on top of the service charge, if the wine is from the ship's store (\$10/bottle in addition to the corkage fee, if the bottle is mine).

Shore Excursions

For a half-day bus excursion I give the guide \$2, \$4 for a full-day excursion. If the guide has spoken with me at length individually or confided to me places for dining or shopping after the tour, I tip him/her \$5 for a half day, \$10 for a whole day. And I don't forget the driver. After all, he/she brought me safely down the Dolomites, or negotiated the traffic in Athens. I give him/her \$1 for a half-day excursion, \$2 for a full-day one.

Baggage Handlers

If I am in my cabin when my bags are delivered, I give the handler \$1/bag, just as I would a bellman ashore. Likewise, if I am escorted to my cabin by a steward I'll never see again, I give him/her \$2.

Spa Services

If the spa has added a 15 percent gratuity to my bill, I round it up (in cash) to between 18 percent and 20 percent, which is what I would normally tip at home.

Butlers

For attentive service by butlers who have served as valets, brought trays of tea or hors d'oeuvres and kept the liquor closet filled, I tip \$5/night at the end of the cruise.

Ultimately it's important to understand that money is not a substitute for saying thank you; it is in addition to verbal thanks. One of the nicest ways passengers can say thank you is to mention stewards by name in the end-of-cruise questionnaire. I have had stewards thank me for compliments I gave on previous cruises when I saw them the next time. And, if you cruise often,

there will be a next time.



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