



The Insider's Guide to Cruise Tipping

What follows below are the suggested out-of-pocket "extras" -- supplemental tips handed out for superlative service or special favors rendered, in order to thank particularly deserving shipboard staff in a way they'll surely appreciate. Of course, the size of the tip should ultimately reflect the excellence of the service.

Pre-tipping can be quite strategic. One instance is your cabin steward, especially if you have special requests or require extra service (e.g., you want a bucket of ice delivered to the cabin nightly; plan to do a lot of entertaining in your cabin; or if there is an infant or someone who is ill in your party). A well-placed tip at the beginning of the cruise can do wonders to help ensure that he or she happily obliges.

Another instance might be a bartender at your preferred onboard bar a hand-passed gratuity on the first day of the sailing can go a long way in having him or her recognize your face in the crowd, and remember just how you like your drink. Or, perhaps, there's a window table for two that you have your heart set on in the main dining room -- a nice tip to the maitre d' on day one can help ensure that she or he never fails to have that table waiting.

Room service stewards should be tipped on the spot, as should non-cruise workers like in-port baggage handlers or tour operators on shore excursions.

Note, too, that there are also gratuities automatically and separately applied to some optional onboard services, like drinks at the bar, or spa and salon services. We've outlined those here, as well.

Finally, keep in mind that there are some services provided by non-cruise staffers for which tips should also be paid out of pocket this extends to port-side baggage handlers, or shore excursion tour operators.

In-Port Baggage Handlers

The baggage handlers who take your bags at arrival at the port don't typically work for the cruise line (but rather the port) and therefore won't share in the onboard tip pool. Consider treating them as you would a bellman at a hotel -- a customary \$1 or \$2 per bag will do. When your cruise concludes, if the port workers aid in getting your bags to your car or a taxi, the same amount would be courteous.

Cabin Stewards and Butlers

Among staffers, you'll likely interact with your cabin attendant the most during the course of your cruise. While the automatic service charges will cover their basic gratuities, it's generally considered good form to tip them a bit extra for a job well done, especially if you have made any special requests. Should you choose to, for a seven-night cruise, consider slipping them \$15 to \$20 at the start of the cruise to ensure special attention

to your stateroom and give them another \$15 to \$20 at the cruise's end -- this works out to about an additional \$2 to \$3 per person, per day, for the duration of the cruise, though you can obviously make it less or more depending on the level of interaction and satisfaction.

Likewise, if you are in a suite, or aboard a luxury sailing, you may have a butler assigned to your room, in lieu of a cabin steward. Since they typically have more duties to meet (bringing trays of tea or hors d'oeuvres, keeping your preferred beverages in stock, shining shoes, etc.), a good guideline, if you've satisfactorily utilized their services, is a supplementary tip of \$3 to \$5 per night, per person the total of any special attention or if a counselor was particularly good with your children, tipping a few dollars per time the facilities were utilized would certainly be appreciated at the cruise's conclusion.

Spa Services

Spas will generally add a 15 to 18 percent gratuity to your bill, which is sufficient, though this number can be adjusted if the service was exceptional or lacking.

Casino Dealers

If you find yourself on a winning streak in the ship's casino (lucky you!), remember to reward your dealer as you would back on land -- there's no standard for tipping dealers, so use your discretion, based in relation to your winnings.

Officers

Do not tip the captain or other ship officers -- they are already well compensated, and the gesture would more likely be a source of embarrassment than flattery.

Ultimately, it's important to understand that money is not a substitute for saying thank you; in addition to verbally expressing gratitude, consider delivering a handwritten thank you note, if you are so inclined. One of the nicest ways passengers can show their appreciation is to mention staff by name in the end-of-cruise questionnaire, or to reach out to their ship supervisor to notify them of the staffer's exemplary service.

Going one step further, a letter of praise for an exceptional employee to the cruise line's head office can give a real boost to a cruise staffer's career.