

It Is a Cruise World After All: New Mega-Ships to Set Sail

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When it comes to cruising, think big.

Three new mega ships – cruise ships that hold more than 6,000 passengers – will be added to the cruise industry's fleet over the next year.

Harmony of the Seas, Royal Caribbean's new mega-ship, is due out in fall 2016 and will be sailing in the Bahamas, Caribbean and the Mediterranean. Oasis and Allure also will debut.

"Cruise ships are getting bigger and better," said Amy Moreno, travel manager for AAA Arizona. "Mega ships might seem intimidating, but they're designed to have really small neighborhoods throughout the ship to create intimacy." With October being National Plan a Cruise Month, now might be a good time to explore the variety of cruises and locations out there. "There will be some good deals," Moreno said. "Everyone has to fill the ships." As a travel resource, AAA Travel experts offer four tips for booking a perfect cruise:

- **Work with an agent:** Whether you are an experienced world traveler or planning your first cruise adventure, a travel agent can reveal little-known secrets for a successful journey. An agent will look at airfare costs independently in addition to fares through the cruise line, as well as book hotel nights before and after the cruise and arrange for less-expensive transfers to the ship.
- **Book early:** People who book early get the cabin they want. If prices go down in the coming weeks or months, a good travel agent will check and to see if your final cost can be adjusted.
- **Pre-book shore excursions:** You often can book excursions before you board the ship through the cruise line, and an agent also can help you find third-party companies that might offer different or less expensive options. If you wait until you're on the ship, you might not get the excursions you want, as they tend to fill up quickly.
- **Arrive a day in advance:** Weather, mechanical issues or delays can wreak havoc on your schedule, so it's best to book a hotel in the departure city the day before. This isn't the time for tight connections; arrive a day early for peace of mind.

"With more cruise options and destinations available to travelers, there are so many reasons to fall in love with cruising," Moreno said. AAA is a full-service travel agency. For more information, visit AAA.com.