I found this on a cruise message board and thought this is the perfect way to start off this informative package. Here it goes.

For all the first timers, I thought that those of us that have been on a few cruises could "break down" the ugly truth about cruising for you, so your expectations are realistic. Here are a few things I thought of:

1. Embarkation is NOT ENJOYABLE, so, just make the best of it. Once you are on the ship, it will be a distant memory.
2. Muster drill is equally not enjoyable. It's over in 15 minutes, and again, a distant memory. You'll appreciate it if you need it!
3. You will experience long lines occasionally. This will be especially evident when trying to get off the ship in port, or standing in the buffet line.
4. Tenders are not fun. They can be hot, overcrowded and smelly, but again, a necessity.
5. The food is sometimes good, sometimes great, and sometimes not great at all. Don't expect 5 star restaurant quality all the time.
6. The mixed drinks are weak. Order beer.
7. The pools can be overcrowded, people will save chairs, and there will most likely be some kids in the hot tubs. If you want them out, call security.
8. Elevators can be slow, take the stairs sometimes.
9. The casinos are tight, don't expect to win, but hey, you never know.
10. You will smell cigarette smoke in the public areas; it's a fact of life.
11. You will feel the ship move. It's a moving vessel, on WATER. Bring bonine, and enjoy yourself.
12. In spite of all this, you will STILL HAVE THE VACATION OF A LIFETIME!!!!! If you go with realistic expectations, you just may enjoy it even more!!
13. You will most likely love cruising so much that you will become addicted. Be prepared.

Everything contained is from my perspective and may not be the same as someone else. Everything is subject to change. The information is to be used as a reference guide.

BEFORE YOU GO

- Proper identification is required. Anyone not having proper documentation will be denied boarding at the port of embarkation without the benefit of a refund. U.S. security procedures require all cruise line passengers 16 or older to present official photo I.D. upon check-in.
  Check with the US Department of State on recent changes to the mandatory passport requirements. Also check Carnival's Website on their policy concerning travel documentation.
- If a minor is traveling without one or both parents the absentee parent(s) must sign a statement stating that the child is allowed to leave the country. I have provided samples in the Cruise 101 section under Parental Authorization Sample Forms. They are in word format and can be changed to suit the situation. You may not even be asked for the form but better safe then sorry. If you are unable to prove the child can leave the country Carnival can deny boarding without refund.
- As soon as you book register by going to www.carnival.com and clicking Register on the top toolbar. You will see a link for the Fun Pass at the bottom of the Home Page. By registering on-line you can get through the boarding process quicker.
- Carry-on bags are limited to a maximum of 16"h x 24"w x 30" length. Bags larger then this will have to be checked-in with a curbside porter. Keep in mind that any bags you carry on before approximately 1:00 may have to stay with you. They often times will block off the cabins until the stewards are done cleaning from the prior cruise.
- Guests who have any medical, physical or other special requirements are required to contact our Guest Access Services at 1-800-438-6744, ext. 70025 or TTY (for hearing impaired) at 1-800-972-4386 to discuss the details of their needs. An accommodation form can be found here.
- Carnival Cruise Lines has a limited supply of wheelchairs on board each of their ships that are to be used for emergency purposes only. For guests who require the use of a wheelchair, they should plan on bringing their own rather than relying on the availability of shipboard equipment. There are a few places that rent wheelchairs. One place that delivers to the cabin is Care Vacations. Shipboard wheelchairs are for on board use only and may not be taken off the ship. All wheelchairs and scooters must be stored inside the stateroom.
- Up to two weeks prior to sailing you can order items from the Carnival website and select GIFTS from the top toolbar – these items will be delivered to your cabin or your table (depending on the item) on the first day of the cruise or at a time you designate on your request. If you have a special request that requires a personal touch (cake delivered a certain day) then be sure and call instead of purchasing online. You can also purchase cakes once onboard by speaking to your waiter or by stopping by the Formalities shop.
- If you plan on renting a tux from the cruise line you need to do this in advance. Go to the Carnival website and select GIFTS from the top toolbar. Then select Formal Wear Rentals . Print off the rental form. For the best fit you can take this form to a local tux shop for fitting. They may charge a slight fee. The form must be returned to Carnival by the deadline indicated.
- Some good web sites to checkout –
- Carnival – Click on the Fun Ships link and select your ship. You can get information on the ship and view Deck Plans.
- Most ships have two dining rooms with the exception of the Spirit Class ships which have only one.
- Main seating is held at 6:00. This time is good for kids, as the Camp closes down during this time and reopens around 9 every night.

- Late seating is held at 8:15, if you like to eat late then this is where to be.
- Carnival is starting to integrate "anytime dining". The program called **Your Time Open Seating Dining**. You call that day and request a time between 5:45 and 9:30. The bottom level of both dining rooms is used for assigned seating and the upper level for those that wish to have flexibility in their dining time. Currently Liberty, Legend, Sensation, Paradise, Miracle, Elation, Conquest, pride, Fantasy, Imagination, and Spirit offer Your Time Dining. Coming soon: Inspiration 7/9, Dream 9/18, and Ecstasy 10/13.
- If you select assigned seating you will have that assignment for the entire cruise.
- Once you're paid in full you will be able to view your documents online. You will want to print the documents. Included is a page with your luggage tags. Print as many as needed. They don't have to be in color. Log in the same as for the Fun Pass and click on MY RESERVATIONS on the top – this will take you to details about your trip. MY DOCUMENTS will have your cruise documents.
- Effective for sailings after August 25th, 2009, Carnival streamlines the delivery of cruise documents. All guests, or their travel agents, can print documents directly from www.carnival.com/mydocuments.
- Instead of filling each tag out make address labels with all the information on it.
  - Be sure to take extras in case you have more bags when you get off or a tag gets damaged going on.
  - If it looks like rain, place a piece of clear shipping tape over the label to protect your information.
  - It's not a bad idea to place a label on a sheet of paper and place it inside each bag in case the tag becomes removed. There is nothing worse then having a missing bag.
- If you have a 45 day out letter for complementary gift - be sure to claim it. This is a letter that Carnival sends to say thank you or sorry. Usually past cruisers will receive one of these if they have contacted Carnival customer service for some reason. Selections range from photo coupons to wine.
- Once you are paid in full and up until 5 days prior to sailing you can book Carnival excursions online by visiting the Carnival website. In most cases you will do better if you book your excursions on your own prior to the cruise. There are many reputable vendors out there but be sure you check them out before you book. The advantage is that the excursions will cost less and in most cases the groups are much smaller which makes the excursion more enjoyable. Do what you feel most comfortable doing. If the excursion you wish to do involves distance or traveling by ferry then I would consider this a good reason to book directly through the cruise. For example: If you want to go to the ruins while in Cozumel you must take a ferry to Playa Del Carmen or if you want to go to Dunns River Falls from Montego Bay this would be the time to book direct with the Carnival.
- For a great map of Cozumel – go to http://www.cancunmap.com/cozumel_map.html
- If you are thinking about taking pre-paid gift cards to use like a credit card (you can have several loaded with small denominations so if you lose it you're really not out much) you can get a great deal through Simon Malls. Simon Malls carry different names so be sure to go to their website to find a location near you – www.simon.com. The cards are accepted anywhere a Visa Debit card is accepted – even outside the United States. The cost depends on the type of card you want. The total cost is the amount you choose to give — from $20 to $500, plus shipping and handling charges. Shipping and Handling for the Simon Gift Card is $5.95 and $6.95 for the custom cards, such as the Longhorn Gift Card. Go to http://www.simon.com/giftcard/how_it_works.aspx for more details.
- Be sure to check any cash card before purchase to ensure you can use it outside the United States.

- If you plan to use a credit card outside the US you may want to consider calling your credit card company to inform them you may be doing so. You will want to put some safeguards in place (just for the trip). This will ensure that if the number does fall into the wrong hands there won't be any unauthorized charges. Talk to your credit card company about the best line of defense. If you're not going to make many purchases I suggest you leave the credit cards onboard, pre-pay your excursions, and take small amounts of cash and/or a debit cash card with a pre-paid cash limit, as I stated above.
- Private parties onboard. If you would like a private party contact the Bon Voyage Wedding Department at: 800 933-4968 (doesn't have to be for a wedding). Cocktail party is for a minimum of twenty guests; the minimum purchase for a party must be at least a one hour of Open-Bar. The party will be based on lounge availability and must take place on a day while the ship is at sea; the party cannot conflict with formal nights, dinner time or embarkation day.