

## Choosing the cruise that's right for you

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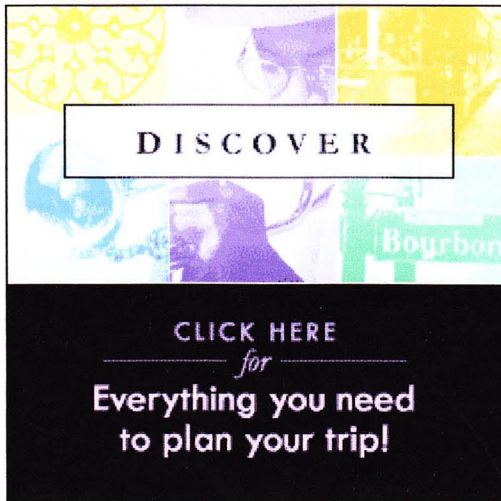
With more ships than ever plying the seas, finding the perfect cruise for your family might seem an overwhelming task.

Don't despair. There are ways to whittle down the options. Here are some tips to help you narrow your choice.

First, decide whose pleasure is paramount, says Luisa Frey Gaynor, family cruise editor at [cruisemates.com](http://cruisemates.com): Is it the kids, the parents or the grandparents? Are morning-till-night kids programs the most important consideration, or one of many requirements you have for the ship?

Consider the ages of your children and then compare programs. Disney is the only line that offers group baby-sitting for kids as young as six weeks (for an extra charge); only a few - Holland America, Royal Caribbean and Celebrity - offer in-room child care. (A typical charge for the service is \$8 per hour, with another \$5 per hour for additional kids.)

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Consider a ship's dining options and your kids' ability to sit. Freestyle cruising - the new trend that allows passengers to eat when and where they want - is the rule on many new ships, while more formal schedules are still the norm on others.

The little extras add up. We hit the library on Holland America's Oosterdam the second day of our cruise and loaded up on fresh kids books. We also had a DVD player in our room, with DVDs available at the front desk, which came in handy during down time. Gaynor also recommends a veranda room if you can afford it and have children who nap. That way, you're not stuck in a dark room with your sleeping child - instead, enjoy a book on the balcony.

One thing I wanted but didn't have was a place to do laundry (self-service washers are rare on ships, says Gaynor). I declined to pay \$12 for the ship's staff to launder a small bag of dirty clothes and instead rinsed out a few things in the sink.

Price, of course, might be your primary consideration. Arlene Goldberg, president of Action Travel in Solon, said most lines don't have special rates for children. Rather, kids are charged as the third or fourth person in a cabin, usually about one-third less than what the first two occupants pay.

Occasionally, you'll find children-sail-free deals (or for half-price) but not usually during the prime family sailing season - over the summer and the winter holidays.