

# **The 16 Things You Need To Know Before You Get A Cruise Line Job**



**By Joel Frenette**

# THE 16 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GET A CRUISE LINE JOB!

*By Joel Frenette*

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# Who's Joel?



My name is Joel Frenette; I'm a 39 year old French Canadian who actually worked on cruise ships for many years.

I have over 10 years' experience in IT and over 14 years' experience in the F&B industry, including 4 and a half years working on cruise lines.

I was the first Canadian to ever sign the employment contract with Carnival Cruise Lines as a Bar Waiter, back in 1996.

I also worked for Princess Cruises for a few years. In total, I worked on 9 different ships over a four and a half year period ending in 2001.

Prior to working on cruise ships I had worked in Hotels and Resorts for 2 years, as a bartender and waiter.

I often enjoy looking back at my many years at sea, and I recommend it to everyone still to this day! I met my wife over 13 years ago while working onboard, and I made a small fortune. These were truly the best years of my young life.

So you want to work on a cruise ship, do you?

You want to escape the rat-race, the creditors, the stressful life of having no money left after paying bills and taxes?

You want to trade your 2 hour traffic-jam-road-rage filled commute with the peaceful sound of waves crashing on a beach?

You want to trade your freezing cold winters for the beautiful warm sub-tropical climate in the Caribbean?

Well, before we talk about all those nice things. I have to warn you. Working on cruise ships will NOT instantly propel you into the "Lifestyles of The Rich and Famous". It is more like a visit into the "Wizard of Oz" - where nothing is at it seems, and you fear the man behind the curtain.

People always ask me: "What's it like to work on a ship?"

[Watch this documentary here](#)

This documentary is by far, the most accurate of all the cruise ship videos out there!  
Paints a bad picture, but I still loved it!

I worked for Carnival Cruises as a Bar Waiter in 1996. I was the first Canadian EVER to sign the contract. I had registered in Liberia (West Africa) and accepted a wage of 45\$ per month.

We worked from 8am to 5am some days. We slept like chickens. Sleeping 20 minutes every couple of hours, and we did work every day for the entire length of the contract - 6 Months straight - No Day OFF!

I learned how to hustle. I had to sell everything that wasn't bolted down in order to make a living.

After paying out about 300\$, I was ready to start hustling for tips for that cruise!  
Hopefully make enough to cover the 'fees' and still make enough for next week!

So once I 'figured out' the ship's system of kickbacks, bribes, and payoffs, I was off to the races, sometimes earning a cool grand a week!

So I loved the cruise line jobs I've had. Yes cruise line work is intense, but ship life is about working hard and playing harder!

Cheers, Joel Frenette



# Chapter 1 – How I Got Hired

“How did you ever get that job?” people ask me, and my response is always the same: “I applied”

I sent my resume to over 50 different cruise companies, river boats, casinos, ski resorts, hotels, even dude ranches. Then after a week or so, I started calling them all so often that it bordered on harassment!

Finally I got a “contract” in the mail. It was enough to go the US embassy and get a C1/D Work Visa.

I was never promised a job, just an interview. That was enough for me to sell off everything I owned and bought myself a 99\$ one-way ticket to Miami from Montreal. I spent the first night getting so drunk on South Beach that I missed the interviews being held the following day!

I made it to the cruise ship’s head office late, sweating out tequila, and I simply asked them if they still needed me! Luckily they did need me, and I started work the very next day!

I don’t recommend this approach, but it worked for me.

When applying for a job, remember to be realistic, you will need experience! If you have never worked as a waiter before, why would a cruise ship hire you? I had worked in two 5-star hotels for 3 years before Carnival cruise lines hired me.

You do not want an entry-level position anyways! Get bar experience BEFORE you apply as a bartender or you will find yourself working as a bar-back.

The biggest mistake people make when sending in a resume is not being specific enough! So, when you apply, apply for a specific job, with a matching cover letter, written specifically for the job description and duties.

Then, you need to contact the cruise ship companies by sending in your resume, either on line, by web, by email or by good old fashion postal mail. Don’t just send in your resume by email, sit back and wait for them to call you! You have to keep pestering these people! They often do not even look at a candidate unless they have been contacted a half-dozen times!

Cruise ship companies also hire through recruiters and hiring agents working directly with the cruise ship companies or sub-contractors working with the cruise companies. For example, Carnival works with these [agencies](#) (among others)

Did I mention - BE PERSISTENT - get a real-person's name & phone number, and then call, call, call. They might expect you to work 12 hours a day, so they will expect you to really work hard at GETTING hired!

Have the proper paperwork. Be ready. Have a passport valid for at least the next 12 months, a clean criminal background check, an ENG-1 physical and vaccinations from a doctor, have references, and have at least an idea of what kind of work visas, or permits you will need. For Example, as a Canadian working for Carnival Cruise Lines out of Miami, Florida, I needed a C1/D Visa, and a Seaman's book.

You can only apply for the C1-D Seaman's Transit Visa if you have an official Letter of Employment from a cruise line.

The Seaman's book is like a 'second passport' and you can [get one here](#) for 50 USD.

Get the most recent cruise line jobs information. That means NO websites from 2007 or older. There was so much bad information out there that I decided to make my own web site!

Back in 1996, I personally got all my contacts by walking into a travel agency, asking for photo copies of all the 1-800 numbers the agent used to book travel. Then I spent the next few days, calling them all, and asking for the most current address to send my resume, and contact names and numbers. I compiled my own list. It took me a few days' work, but that's how I got the most "up-to-date" list possible.

Today, you can spend just a few minutes on each of the major cruise line websites and search for their "jobs" or "careers" links.

Lists of common job titles and descriptions with the specific duties and requirements can easily be found online too.

## Chapter 2 – Tax-Free Cash

Do not send your tips directly to your usual bank account.

You see most of us are taxed on worldwide income. We are obliged to pay taxes to our home country. Cruise line jobs are often advertised as "Tax-Free Income", and what they really mean is that they do not withhold any taxes, big difference.

Wages will have to be reported to your home country, but I was only making 45\$ a month salary. Cash tips are also supposed to be reported, so report them, but you may want to keep some cash offshore.

That means holding your cash tips in the crew office safe until you have enough to wire transfer or deposit into an offshore bank account; preferably, in a jurisdiction with little or no income tax, like the Bahamas, the Cayman Islands, Bermuda, Gibraltar, or Monaco.

I took my first afternoon off in Miami, and opened a USA bank account with a 1000\$ deposit, then asked for a letter of reference from the bank manager simply stating that I had an "Account in good-standing".

Next day, in the Bahamas, while everyone was off to the beach, I had an appointment with Barclay's bank, where I deposited 1000\$. Then I was ready to wire-transfer any additional tips to that account from anywhere in the world, even the crew purser's office onboard.

Then once I was back in Canada, I could request small wire transfers back into my Canadian bank accounts. They must report transfers in excess of 3000 USD, so make small transfers.

This is NOT intended to be legal, tax or investment advice. Seek professional help for this BEFORE you go work at sea.

## Chapter 3 – Parlez-Vous Français?

Preference will be given to those who know English and at least a second language.

Do you know another language? The international language of business is English, but you will find many other languages spoken commonly on board. You will find that knowing more languages is useful for communicating with other crew members, getting around in local ports and talking to taxi drivers or tour guides, but it will also help in communicating with the passengers.

Bring phrase books, and learn new languages. Everyone agrees that being immersed in other cultures is the best way to learn another language. This can be a huge advantage later in life.

Being labeled an ignorant tourist is easy when you don't make an effort to learn a few simple phrases in a foreign language. You will be amazed at how much respect and trust you quickly gain, by simple picking up a phrase book and trying. I don't really mean learning the language in some of your ports of call, but learning the languages of the crew members you will be working with! I had worked in the accommodations department where most of my colleagues were Pilipino, my supervisors were Portuguese, and I worked on ships that had Italian officers... Learning those languages helped me do my job and made life onboard easier. But of course, learning a little Japanese goes a long way to making some tips out of your Japanese guests, for example.

# Chapter 4 – Polyphasic Sleep

You will be working around the clock, be prepared to live like a chicken, and cat nap, and pay people to cover some shifts.

Get an alarm clock with HUGE AM PM display because you will be in a room without a porthole, so therefore with NO daylight. You will be working so many split-shifts that you will wake up at 3:00 and NOT know if it is 3am or 3pm. Trust me, it is confusing!

You need to realize that you will be working ALL the time. I was serving and working around the clock. As a butler, I was required to work from 630am to 10pm every day.

I've seen cabin stewards work three days in a row without sleep, until exhaustion, just to meet all the duties of "turnaround day"

Research has shown that [polyphasic sleep](#) that consists of 10-20 minute naps throughout the 24-hour schedule CAN replace full-night sleeps!

You need to realize that you may NOT have ANY days off.

I had grown men cry in front of me when I told them they had to work for the next 6 months without a day off! I remember a new recruit who was excited about our itinerary, and was asking me which port HE was going to get off. He said it didn't matter; we were in San Juan, on Sunday, St Thomas, on Monday, St Martin, on Tuesday, Dominica on Wednesday, Martinique on Thursday, and Barbados on Friday... Back to sail all day Saturday and arriving in San Juan on Sunday again... That was the itinerary for the next 6 months. Well, I asked him what day it was, and he replied it was January 15th, and I promptly replied that his next day off was going to be July 15th!

You will be required to work every day, no days off, for 6 to 9 months. Be prepared to pay people to cover some shifts, so you can at least get a few hours off during a port day, to enjoy the sights.

## Chapter 5 – Flags Of Convenience

"Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."

Be prepared to lose your rights, as a worker, as a human being, you have no recourse to the common human liberties that we as North Americans come to expect, as we neglect that most of the world is still under some form of monarchy, dictatorship, communist, socialist, or fascist rule.

Since the ships fly ["flags of convenience"](#), the cruise ship companies have many rules and regulations that would not be accepted here in North America.

Be prepared for "legalized slavery". I was the first Canadian to sign a crew member work contract with Carnival Cruise Lines as a Bar Waiter, back in 1996. Why? Because they only paid me 45\$ a month salary and they hustled me for about 1000\$ a month of my own money, just to keep my job, and have the "privilege of serving people", while working around the clock, with no days off, expecting to make tips, and it was even against company policy to even talk to the passengers about how little they paid us!

I remember hearing this over and over again: "If you don't like it, go home!"

## Chapter 6 – Passports

They do hold your passport in the crew office safe, which made me feel imprisoned.

Since your passport will have an employer sponsored work permit or visa in it, you are essentially at the mercy of your employer. If he or she decides to fire you, you have to fly to your home country because once the employment contract is severed, so is your Visa or permit to be in that foreign country.

Have a valid passport, and also have all the required VISA's, and also get a seaman's book. Make photocopies of these documents and carry them with you at all times when in port.

If I had to return to sea, I would ensure that I had a list of all the foreign embassies with me at all times. The addresses, contact names, and phone numbers, with local dialing rules.

I would also suggest contacting your country's embassy and notifying them of your travel plans, and emergency contact info.

On a side note, let your credit card companies and banks know you are leaving too, or else they may cancel, suspend or close your accounts for fear of fraud.

# Chapter 7 – Ignorance of the Law, Excuses No Man

["Ignorantia juris non excusat"](#)

Be informed about local laws BEFORE you go ashore. The staff officer used to play the movie ["Midnight Express"](#) throughout the ship, on continuous loop, as we approached Istanbul. If you have never seen this movie, it shows the horror of getting caught with hashish in Turkey!

One example is that there is a [ban on chewing gum in Singapore!](#) You face a 500\$ USD to 1000\$ USD fine for first offense!

Another example is a 25-year old woman who faces [caning for graffiti in Singapore!](#)

I have seen many friends go to jail in foreign countries for getting caught smoking pot on the beach.

Also, the locals in Togo, who mainly practice Voodoo, DO NOT appreciate you "stealing their souls" by taking photos with cameras!

Do not do any drugs or break any laws while away. Many people have a cool image of smoking a joint on the beach in Jamaica, but if you get caught, you can be doing some time in a foreign country with no knowledge of how to defend yourself, no resources, and no contacts. I have seen friends disappear for 6 to 9 months rotting away in a foreign jail without ever getting a chance to even CALL anyone...

Also, the DEA do conduct random drug test while on board, and pot does stay in your system for up to 3 to 6 months. So even if you are in Amsterdam (where it is LEGAL) while on vacation.

You can get hired, and still can FAIL a drug screening months later, and end up getting FIRED, and or JAILED.

# Chapter 8 - IPM

You will not be allowed to leave the ship at every port.

As part of your weekly safety drills and duties, you will be required to do In Port Manning, also known as IPM, which is a law that requires a certain number of the crew to REMAIN on board, even while in a port of call. Be prepared to swap days with some staff, so plan your excursions ashore and use your time wisely.

The familiar recruiting poster, "Join the Navy and See the World"; to which some forgotten humorist has added, "Through a port hole."

The reality is that you will be working so many hours that many "port days" will be spent sleeping, to catch up on rest. Many "port days" will be spent onboard as part of your "IPM" duties, so that you will maybe get a chance to spend only a few hours ashore about 1 out of every 3 port days.

## Chapter 9 – Don't 'Miss the Boat'

Be prepared that the ship will sail without you, and you can find yourself in some pretty sticky situations.

If you are in a local bar, having a drink and you hear the ship's horn blast three times, RUN to the gangway! It is about to sail away without you!

That means you can find yourself in a foreign country without a passport and without cash. Unless you have all the US consulates and embassies on speed dial, you could be in trouble.

Let your home country's immigration services know you are going away at sea.

You should carry photocopies of your passport and visas, because your actual passport will be held in the crew office's safe.

One musician friend of mine, left on a tour in Alexandria, Egypt with a local taxi driver. When he asked to return to the port, a second taxi driver had dropped him off at the wrong port! He missed the ship, had to walk through the unknown city to find an embassy. Kids were throwing rocks at him, and he was scared to death. When he found the embassy, he had difficulty proving who he was without his passport, and had trouble arranging for airplane tickets Haifa, in Israel, our next port of call without money. He made it, and shortly thereafter he quit. The entire experience was traumatizing.

## Chapter 10 – Life below Decks

You will be essentially confined to crew quarters, because you are not allowed to go to the Casino, the shows, the pool, or the shops.

You will be living below decks, like a rat, unless you are working and that area is part of your normal work area, you will not be allowed in any passenger areas.

You will be confined to cramped crew quarters most of the time. Essentially, you are either in your shared cabin, the hallway (most Pilipino parties are here), the shared showers, the galley, the gym (if your ship has one for the crew), or working.

Most of the crew lives on the first 4 decks found below the water line, so we get no sunlight, and you quickly lose the sense of 'time-of-day'.

Did I also forget to mention that the food in the crew galley is NOT the same food that the guests are being served?

The food consists of un-identified fish, freeze dried potatoes, and rice, rice, rice. Fresh fruits and vegetables are a rarity!

# Chapter 11 – No Fighting

We've all seen the scenes in the movies where the sailors get into fights with the local rednecks in a bar. Well, I sure felt that way, because there is absolutely NO fighting with anyone onboard.

Tensions can easily build up when you sleep, eat, work, and bathe with the same few people every day for months and months.

We used to "settle arguments" in the crew bar by drinking together and finally deciding a "winner" by placing a lit cigarette between our arms, letting it burn, and seeing who would pull away first!

DO NOT fight while on board, if you are short-tempered, aggressive, and tend to punch first and ask for forgiveness later. You will quickly learn that ANY altercation, gets ALL those involved fired immediately. That means you get escorted by police to the next available airport, and getting fired this way will ban you for life from ever getting another employment VISA again!

## Chapter 12 – Too Much Sex?

We all know what else the sailors in the movies do while in port, and yes, it is very accurate. So, be careful to NOT catch any venereal diseases.

If even a few crew members go to local prostitution when in port, and they are also sleeping with other crew members on board, then STD's can spread quickly.

I recall that the medics always handed out free condoms! Why?

STD's spread quickly. And word of it spreads even faster. Because it is such a small little community, everyone will know your business if you go to the ship's doctor, or nurse. There is essentially no medical privacy on board.

Because the cabins are mostly all shared (except for Guest Entertainers and Officers), it always seemed like we were having group sex, because there was always someone "sleeping" in the bunk above or below you while you were shagging someone!

In fact, I spent a lot of time trying to find unique places to have sex outside my cabin, like in the catwalk above the shows, or in the hidden storage closets.

Of course, you are not allowed to sleep with the passengers, although we all used to get away with it. Every turnaround day we would scout for new girls to flirt with. If we did get into a guests cabin for a late night affair, we would try to escape back into the crew quarters without being seen by ship's security.

I always held a folded 20\$ bill in my hand for that run, so that if I was cornered by security I could quickly give them the cash and keep running.

Since passengers are "off limits", that leaves most of the crew shagging with each other, and there is plenty of sex at sea.

You'll find yourself turning down sex, just so you can get some actual sleep!

# Chapter 13 – No Drunk, I Am Not Officer!

Do not get drunk.

It is against naval rules to be intoxicated beyond your capacity to fulfill your safety duties at any point while onboard.

That being said, you will find the “ship life” culture revolves around drinking 24/7 for the entire duration of your contract.

It helped me to drink all day, every day, just to keep my “sanity”

The crew bar is a party every night after work, and drinks are cheap. Not to mention, you can buy bottles of booze for a dollar in most ports.

Now keep in mind, if you get in trouble for any reason, they can force you to do a breath-test and “Bingo”, you’re fired!

# Chapter 14 – Social Casts

Be prepared for some uncommon workplace habits, like sexual harassment, intimidation, and blackmail. Just remember, you aren't in Kansas anymore, and the good old North American labor laws simply DO NOT apply. If your boss says "Pay me for a good section", or he singles you out because he doesn't like you, then deal with it.

The ships are registered in offshore jurisdictions; they fly "flags of convenience", and they do this to avoid labor laws amongst other reasons.

Remember, the cruise ship environment, is social-cast based. You are given special privileges for being white, English, Christian, straight, male, any other, race, religion, language, ethnicity gets you treated differently. Deal with it. "Don't like it go home"

The basic hierarchy is this: From the bottom up  
Crewmembers report to officers  
Staff report to officers  
Officers report to the Captain  
The Captain Rules!

You will therefore be eating in segregated galleys, and drinking in different bars. Most staff does not even know where the crew lives, eat or drink on board!

# Chapter 15 – Cash Is King

Bring Money, and be prepared to “pay your way”

Yes, cash is king, and everyone will quickly explain how the bribery and kickbacks work onboard.

In fact, this is the way the rest of the world works. When you leave the USA, you will quickly see that anything is possible with a few bucks in hand. But having cash was essential for me to earn some tips.

I had to pay my manager for good shifts. I had to pay the chef to get my guests food orders in a timely fashion. I had to pay the laundry room attendants in order to get my guests dry-cleaning on time. I had to pay the casino manager in order to be introduced to the “high rollers”. I had to pay my stewards to do extra work for me, and to give me some time off.

It didn't stop there, we had to pay to keep our jobs, and for those who got hired through a recruiting agency, they often had to pay them cash to get the job. Many crew members would have to work for months just to repay the employment agency back home who got them to contract!

# Chapter 16 – Would I Do It All Again?

After reading this you may wonder why I ever did so many contracts.

I honestly enjoyed myself immensely; it was the best time of my life. I met so many people, including the love of my life, Shelby.

I've been to over 75 countries, rode Harley's in Maui, Scuba dove with man-eating sharks in Tahiti, surfed in Barbados, snowboarded in Norway, and so much more.

I made enough money to enjoy myself in so many ports and I literally did things that I otherwise would never have been able to do.

So, if you can put everything you own in storage or sell it all off, and you are willing to work hard and save money for 6 months, then you will have a fist full of cash when you get your actual time off between contracts. Rinse and repeat.

I recommend sending out as many resumes as possible, pack a backpack full of board shorts, a few phrase books, a camera, some cash, and get ready for the time of your life!

Cheers, Joel Frenette  
PS: Thanks for reading my book!



Here are some recommended resources:



**Get a great job on a luxury cruise ship.**  
**GET INSIDERS' SECRETS!**

- \* Earn \$2000-\$6000 monthly
- \* Pay no living expenses
- \* Learn a second language
- \* Have fun and enjoy life

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