

SAMPLE CHAPTER

CRUISE LIKE CREW



MAKE THE MOST OF THE CRUISE YOU PAID FOR



Overlooked perks. Smarter spending.
Better days aboard and ashore.

CAROL BRENNAN

4. Package Arithmetic: When the Bundle Is Worth It

Packages are sold with an appealing promise: stop counting and enjoy yourself. That convenience can be real. It is not the same as saving money.

The right question is not “How many drinks break even?” It is “What would this package cost us, what eligible things would we otherwise buy, and what is the convenience difference worth?” The same method works for beverages, Wi-Fi, dining, spa access, photographs, and mixed bundles.

Step 1: Find the actual package cost

Use the checkout total for every required traveler. Include service charges, taxes, or gratuities shown before purchase. Check whether the package must cover the whole voyage and whether another adult in the cabin must buy it too.

This is not theoretical. Royal Caribbean’s current Deluxe Beverage Package FAQ says all guests of legal drinking age in the same stateroom must purchase the package when one does; packages are single-guest and may not be shared. Other lines and products have different rules. Your denominator is not “my package” if the rules require two.

Use the equation that matches the quote:

- **Per-person daily quote:** $\text{daily price} \times \text{charged days} \times \text{required buyers} + \text{any mandatory charges not already in that price}.$
- **Per-person voyage quote:** $\text{voyage price} \times \text{required buyers} + \text{any mandatory charges not already in that price}.$
- **Whole-party checkout total:** use the final total shown for all required buyers; do not multiply it again.

If the checkout already includes a tax, gratuity, or service charge, do not add it twice.

Do not use the crossed-out retail value on the sales page.

Step 2: Price your likely use without it

Build a normal day, not a heroic break-even day. Separate sea days from port days. Many people drink, browse, and dine differently when they are ashore for eight hours.

For a beverage comparison, include only drinks you would happily order at menu prices. Add any service charge that applies without the package. Do not count included water, standard coffee, tea, or juices as paid purchases if your fare provides them and they satisfy you.

For Wi-Fi, ask what you need to do: receive messages, browse, video-call, stream, or work. Check how many devices can be connected at once, not how many devices you own. A one-device plan may be enough when the current terms permit switching between your own devices. Port-day mobile data may reduce your need, but confirm your carrier's roaming terms and keep cellular service off at sea unless you understand maritime roaming charges.

For dining, price the meals you would actually reserve. Included main dining, buffets, cafés, and casual venues have real value because they are already paid for. A specialty package should compete against the specialty meals you want, not against the false idea that included food is “free but inferior.”

Step 3: Remove ineligible and duplicate value

Read the exclusions. Common questions include:

- Is there a per-item price ceiling?
- Are bottles, minibar, room service, licensed cafés, or private destinations excluded?

- Are there daily limits or only one item per transaction?
- Are all restaurants and menu items eligible?
- Does a dining package guarantee a time, or only the right to request one?
- Does your fare, loyalty tier, suite, casino offer, or travel-agent benefit already include part of it?
- Do unused credits disappear?

If you would not use a benefit, give it a value of zero. If you are unsure, put it in a separate **possible value** line rather than making the purchase depend on it.

Step 4: Calculate the cash difference

Compare the same intended purchases on both sides:

Package-plan total = all-traveler package total + planned purchases the package does not cover

Pay-as-you-go total = all planned purchases without the package, with the same applicable charges

Cash difference = package-plan total – pay-as-you-go total

If you compare only eligible items, leave costs common to both choices out of both sides. Never remove the same unwanted or duplicate benefit twice.

Convenience premium = the positive cash difference you are willing to pay to stop thinking about individual charges

If the cash difference is negative, the package is cheaper on your realistic use. If positive, ask whether convenience and flexibility are worth that amount. This gives both saving and simplicity an honest place.

Worked example A: a package that does not pay

The following is illustrative and is not a current cruise-line quote.

Elaine and Robert are comparing a beverage package for a seven-night itinerary with four long port days.

Item	Elaine	Robert	Two-person total
Package price shown for voyage	\$420	\$420	\$840
Mandatory charge shown at checkout	\$84	\$84	\$168
Package cost	\$504	\$504	\$1,008
Likely eligible drinks at menu prices, including applicable charge	\$286	\$244	\$530

The package costs \$478 more than their likely purchases: \$1,008 – \$530.

They would enjoy not checking prices, but they do not value that convenience at \$478. They skip the package and set an optional drinks budget of \$600. That budget is more than their estimate, so they can order what they genuinely want without trying to “get their money’s worth.”

This is important: skipping a package need not mean spending the week denying yourself. A generous à-la-carte allowance can provide both freedom and a lower expected cost.

Worked example B: a bundle that does pay

Now consider Priya and Sam on a seven-night itinerary with three sea days. Again, the prices are invented.

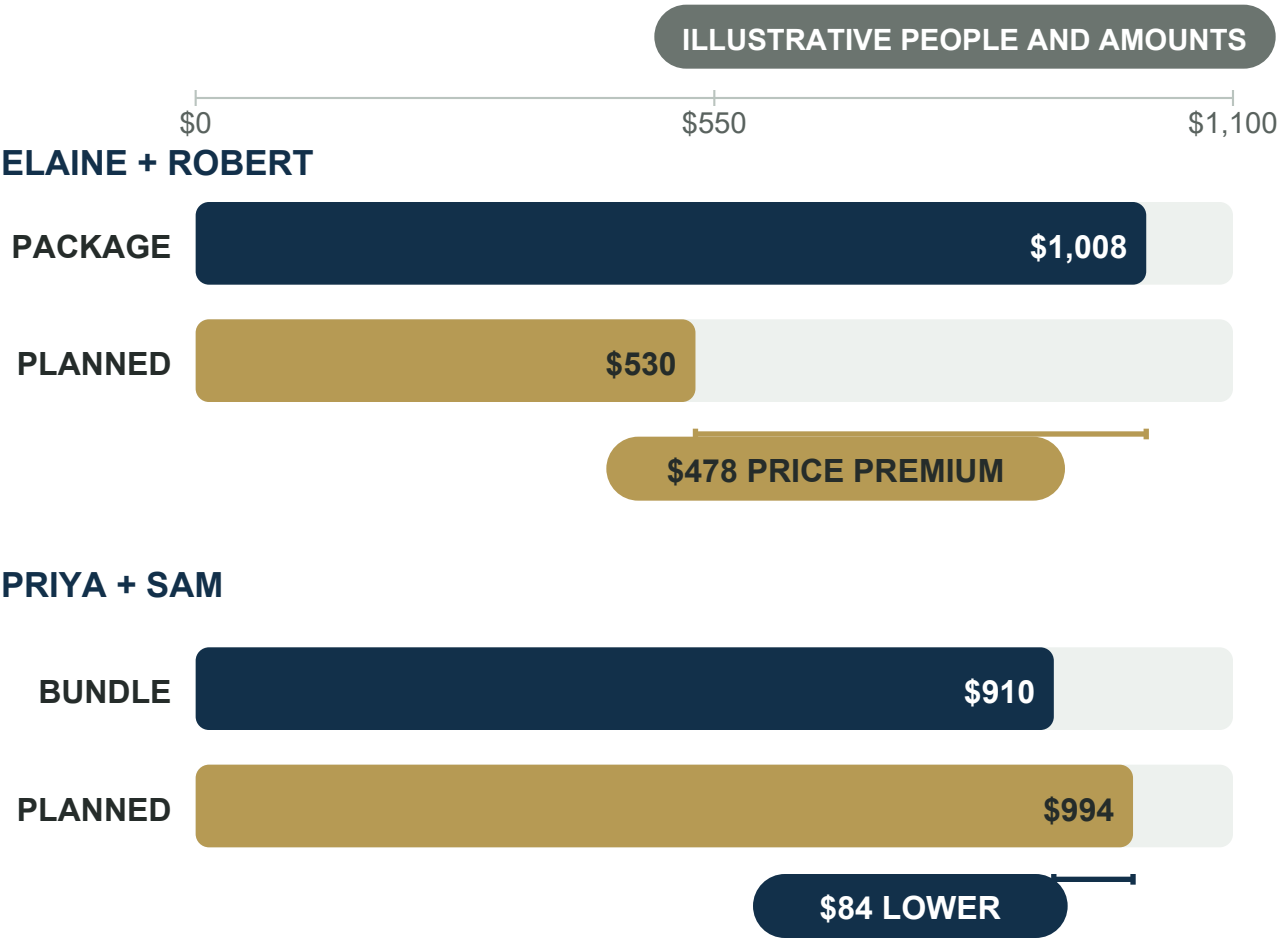
Their illustrative all-in bundle checkout total is \$65 per person per day for seven charged days, or \$910 for two, with no further mandatory package charge in this example. It includes the drinks they would otherwise buy, one-device Wi-Fi for each person, and crew appreciation.

Likely separate purchase	Two-person total
Eligible drinks and applicable service charges	\$560
Wi-Fi they would otherwise buy	\$210
Crew appreciation otherwise charged	\$224
Likely separate total	\$994

The bundle is \$84 less than their expected separate purchases. They also value having separate internet access. If the current terms match their needs, the package is a reasonable purchase.

Notice what made this work: they already intended to buy each major component. The bundle did not manufacture “savings” by assigning retail value to unwanted desserts, fitness classes, photographs, or meals.

Visual lesson 4: Compare the Whole Party



Illustrative example, not a current package quote.

What to notice: Elaine and Robert’s package would cost \$1,008 for \$530 of likely use - a \$478 premium. Priya and Sam’s would cost \$910 for \$994 of likely purchases - an \$84 saving.

Try it: What is your whole-party, whole-trip cash difference?

Dining packages need a calendar test

A dining package can look attractive per meal and still be poor value if the available times fight your port schedule or shows. Place the intended meals on actual days before buying.

Suppose three specialty dinners for two cost \$360 separately, while a package costs \$270. The apparent saving is \$90. If the only available times make you miss two priority performances, the package no longer buys the holiday you wanted. One well-timed specialty dinner at \$120 may be better value than three discounted compromises.

Reservation access also matters. A package may not secure every restaurant or time. Read the current booking process and cancellation terms, especially if the package requires reservations after boarding.

Wi-Fi packages need a purpose test

Write the specific reason you need connection and how often. “Stay in touch” might mean one traveler checking messages twice daily, which a single connection may cover. It might mean both travelers being reachable for a vulnerable relative, which can justify separate connections and clearer backup arrangements. It might mean streaming films you could download at home.

Pay for the service level that solves the purpose. Do not pay for constant connection out of habit if being offline is part of the holiday.

Repricing without losing what you value

Promotions change. If your line allows cancellation and repurchase, compare the complete new checkout - not only the banner percentage. Confirm that the desired item or time remains available, the old purchase can be cancelled, and the refund timing is acceptable. Take screenshots of the old confirmation, new offer, and final result.

If a scarce reservation is attached, the small saving may not justify releasing it. Price is only one currency; availability and attention count too.

Conditional recommendation

Choose the package when your realistic eligible use meets or exceeds its total cost, or when a modest positive difference is worth the convenience to you. Skip it when you must change your habits to break even, when much of the bundle duplicates what you have, or when the package pushes out a higher priority.

If the result is close, favor the choice that creates less pressure. A prepaid package can make one traveler relax. It can make another feel obliged to consume. Both reactions are part of value.

Your next action

Take one package currently offered for your sailing. Write its all-traveler checkout total. Estimate one normal sea day and one normal port day without it, then multiply by the itinerary. While building the estimate, give unwanted and duplicate benefits no added value; do not subtract them again later. Compare the same planned purchases on both sides, then decide using the cash difference and a separately named convenience premium.

Source Notes and Policy Boundaries

Sources below were accessed or verified on 7 September 2026. Cruise-line policies, prices, inclusions, apps, and reservation systems can change. Confirm the current page for your line, market, ship, sailing, fare, and booking before acting. Crew observations are attributed to the named person and do not establish fleet-wide rules.

Current official cruise-line information

- Royal Caribbean, [What is included in a cruise fare](#): examples of complimentary dining, entertainment, activities, and onboard tools; availability varies.
- Royal Caribbean, [Reservations and purchases in the app](#): pre-cruise and onboard functions, with entertainment and activity reservations varying by ship.
- Royal Caribbean, [Why pre-reserve onboard show tickets](#): named ships and the distinction between reservations and first-come access.
- Royal Caribbean, [Beverage package overview](#) and [same-stateroom purchase rule](#): eligibility, exclusions, individual use, and whole-cabin implications for the named product.
- Royal Caribbean Australia, [Lower Cruise Planner prices](#): cancel-and-repurchase process rather than a difference refund; current terms and availability still need checking.
- Royal Caribbean, [Will the ship wait for guests on a shore excursion?](#): Royal Caribbean's return arrangement for delayed line-booked tours and independent travelers' responsibility.
- Royal Caribbean, [Prohibited items](#) and Carnival, [Electric outlets and USB ports](#): useful evidence that electrical-item rules differ by line.
- Princess Cruises, [Compare cruise packages](#) and [package terms](#): current examples of fare-bundle benefits, limits, and date-dependent terms.
- Holland America, [Navigator app](#): a current line-specific example of an app channel for selected onboard requests; functions vary by ship.
- AT&T, [Cruise Day Pass support](#): one current carrier example explaining maritime-network use and how airplane mode or disabled data roaming can avoid pay-per-use data charges. Check the terms of your own carrier and device.

Named crew and former-crew perspectives

- AARP, [Secrets From a Cruise Director](#), as told to Veronica Stoddart: Renata Bacal on cancellation checks, port briefings, and ship/terminal details.
- The Kitchn, [5 Things You Should Know About Cruises from a Former Crew Member](#): former youth staff member Trish Friesen on judging cabin value by likely use, passenger traffic patterns, and quieter ship opportunities. Published in 2017; used only for durable observations, not current policy.
- Crew Center, [19 Cruise Tips for Passengers from a Former Cruise Ship Employee](#): former crew member Zlatko Simovski on all-aboard time, account review, and specific crew feedback.
- Covington Travel, [What Does a Cruise Director Do?](#): cruise director Rick Spath on routing questions to the responsible department. Published in 2012; used as a limited service principle, not current hierarchy.

Government health, document, and screening guidance

- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Cruise Ship Travel](#): health preparation, medication for the trip plus delays, medical care abroad, and when to contact the ship's medical center.
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Cruise Ship Travel, Yellow Book](#): ship-specific medical-capability questions, pre-existing needs, and health/evacuation coverage considerations.
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Travel Insurance](#): distinctions among trip cancellation, travel-health, and evacuation coverage.
- U.S. Department of State, [Cruise Ships](#): U.S. passport and cruise-travel guidance. Travelers should use authorities appropriate to their nationality and itinerary.
- U.S. Transportation Security Administration, [Travel tips](#): U.S. screening information, including medically necessary liquids. It does not replace cruise-line or destination rules.

This guide provides general travel-planning education. It is not individualized medical, legal, insurance, immigration, accessibility, or financial advice. Use qualified professionals and current official authorities when the decision requires them.