What to wear on a cruise when you are over 50

Written by somebody who is. Not a 24-year-old in a cut-out dress telling you what is on trend this season.

THE SHORT ANSWER

Royal Caribbean, Carnival and Princess all publish two formal evenings on a seven-day sailing; Celebrity publishes one to two with no rule tied to length. What is actually banned in dining rooms is short: swimwear, bare feet, tank tops, cut-off jeans, gym shorts and baseball caps. Ordinary jeans are permitted on Royal Caribbean and Carnival. No line permits a clothing iron in the cabin.

Facts checked against official sources on 24 September 2026

WHY I AM THE ONE WRITING THIS

I am fifty-six. I have sailed Royal Caribbean, Celebrity and Princess. I have been too cold on a deck at seven in the morning and too hot on a pier at two in the afternoon, sometimes on the same day.

And I have stood in front of an open suitcase the night before a cruise thinking *what on earth do I actually wear to this*, which is why you are here.

So this is not a lookbook. It is what the cruise lines actually publish as their rules, what I have learned about the gap between those rules and real life, and the one thing almost nobody writes about, which is shoes.

First, the rules, because most articles guess at them

There are only two hard rules on a cruise ship and both are published. Everything else is softer than people think.

Check before you sail

The official rules behind this guide, one scan away.

Point your phone camera at a code. Your phone opens the official page. The full web addresses are in the sources list at the back of this guide.

Check the official source

Cruise lines change these rules. What the official page says on the day you sail is what counts. These are not paid links.

Dress code
Royal Caribbean

Dress code
Celebrity

Dining room dress code
Carnival

What to pack
Norwegian

Pre-cruise FAQ
Princess

Full guide online: photos, live prices and the latest updates at **aicruisegranny.com/cruise-wear-over-50**

Official sources only: no paid links on this page.

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Rule one: two formal nights on a seven-day cruise

Royal Caribbean	**Two** on a 6 to 10 night sailing. One on a 5-night, three on 11 to 14.
Carnival	**Two** "Cruise Elegant" evenings on 6+ days.
Princess	**Two** formal evenings on a 7 to 13 day cruise.
Celebrity	"One to two" Evening Chic nights. Celebrity publishes **no rule tied to length**, which is the only genuine unknown of the four.

So pack two evening outfits for a week. Not seven. Two.

Rule two: what is actually banned in the dining room

This is published per line and it is shorter than you would expect:

- **Royal Caribbean:** "Bare feet are not allowed at any time in any venue and tank tops are not permitted in the Main Dining Room or Specialty Dining venues for dinner."
- **Carnival:** no "gym shorts, bathing suit attire, cut-off jeans, sleeveless shirts for men and baseball hats."
- **Celebrity:** no "swimsuits, see-through coverups or robes, bare feet, tank tops, T-shirts, and baseball caps."
- **Princess:** avoid "swimwear, gym shorts, ripped jeans and ball caps."

Read that list again and notice what is *not* on it. Jeans are fine on Royal Caribbean and Carnival — Carnival names "jeans (no cut-offs)" as acceptable Cruise Casual for both men and women. Nobody bans a cardigan. Nobody bans flat shoes. Nobody is measuring your hemline.

> **Celebrity is the strictest on daytime wear** and says so plainly: "Shorts and flip flops are not considered Smart Casual." Royal Caribbean goes the other way — "Shorts are welcome for breakfast and lunch." If you like being comfortable in the daytime, that difference between lines is worth knowing before you book.

The honest answer to "will I be underdressed?"

No.

On formal night you will see everything from a floor-length gown to a nice blouse and dark trousers, in the same room, at the same table. Both are fine and neither gets a look. The

rule is a collar and shoes, not couture.

Where people actually go wrong is the other direction: they buy a whole holiday wardrobe they will never wear again, wear about a third of it, and drag the rest around the Caribbean in a suitcase.

WHAT I ACTUALLY PACK FOR SEVEN DAYS

Two evening outfits. One dressier, one that will do. Both in fabric that does not crease, because the one thing every line agrees on is that **you cannot bring an iron** — Royal Caribbean, Celebrity, Carnival and Norwegian all prohibit clothing irons and garment steamers outright.

Three daytime bottoms and five tops. Everything goes with everything. One colour family. This is the whole trick and it is not glamorous.

One cardigan or light jacket that lives in my day bag. Ships are air-conditioned to a temperature somebody else chose.

Two swimsuits, so one is always dry.

A proper cover-up, because a wet swimsuit is not allowed in the dining room and you will want lunch.

That is it. That is the list. I have never once come home wishing I had brought more clothes.

Now the part nobody writes about: shoes

Every cruise wardrobe article ends at the dress and stops. But the thing that will decide whether your holiday is good or awful is on your feet, and past fifty that is not a small point.

Here is what your shoes have to cope with in one week:

- **A wet boardwalk.** Ketchikan's own visitor bureau publishes the warning: the Creek Street boardwalk "can be wet or slippery, especially during rainy weather." Wet wood on a slope is how a good day ends in an X-ray room.
- **A gangway at an angle.** Carnival publishes that guests must "be able to safely navigate the angle of the gangway while the ship is docked." That angle changes with the tide.
- **A tender.** A small boat moving against a bigger one, with a step across. Carnival publishes that "safety restrictions prohibit crew from carrying individuals onto or off the shuttles."
- **Standing.** Not walking — standing. In a queue, at a rail, waiting for a tram. Standing still is harder on your feet than walking and it is most of a port day.

> **So: two pairs of shoes you can stand up in for three hours, already broken in.** One for daytime with grip on the sole, one that works with your evening outfits and is still flat or low. A pretty shoe you cannot walk in is a day you spend sitting down.

If your body has opinions, dress for that first

Nobody writes this bit either. Past a certain age the wardrobe question stops being about looking nice and starts being about getting through the day.

- **Pockets.** Your cabin card is your room key, your wallet and your ID for a week. A pocket, or a lanyard, means you are not clutching it.
- **Things you can get on and off yourself** in a cabin bathroom the size of a phone box, possibly on a moving ship.
- **A layer for the medical centre temperature.** Ships run cold.
- **If you use a scooter or a wheelchair**, think about what catches. Long floaty skirts and wheels are a bad combination, and so are loose trouser hems.

The laundry question that changes everything

How much you pack depends entirely on whether you can wash anything, and the lines differ more than people realise.

Princess	**Has self-service laundry rooms**, and publishes that irons are provided in them. You can pack for four days and do a wash.
Royal Caribbean	**No self-service laundry at all.** Published: "For safety concerns self-service laundry facilities are not provided onboard our ships." Wash-and-fold is **$34.99 per bag**.
Celebrity	**No self-service laundry.** Wash-and-fold **$59.99**, wash-and-press $71.99.
Norwegian	"Laundry is not self-service." No price published.

On a two-week Princess cruise I pack roughly the same as a one-week Royal Caribbean cruise. That is the single biggest lever on how heavy your case is, and it is decided by which line you booked.

Alaska is a different wardrobe entirely

Everything above assumes a Caribbean sailing. Alaska is not that. NOAA's normals give Juneau an average **low of 40.3°F in May**, and the fjord mornings — which are the best part — are colder still with wind on top.

If you are sailing north, read what to pack for an Alaska cruise, which is built on the actual monthly temperatures rather than the word "layers."

MY VERDICT

Two evening outfits, one colour family for everything else, and two pairs of shoes you can stand up in. That is the whole answer and it fits in one case.

Buy the shoes first and wear them around the house for a week before you go. Everything else on this page matters less than that.

Questions about cruise wear over 50

What do women over 50 wear on a cruise?

The same published dress code as everyone else, which is less strict than people expect. Two formal or "elegant" evenings on a seven-day sailing for Royal Caribbean, Carnival and Princess. In the daytime, what is actually banned in dining rooms is swimwear, bare feet, tank tops, cut-off jeans, gym shorts and baseball caps. Ordinary jeans are permitted on Royal Caribbean and Carnival.

How many formal outfits do I need for a 7-day cruise?

Two. Royal Caribbean publishes two formal nights for 6 to 10 night sailings, Carnival two Cruise Elegant evenings for 6+ days, and Princess two formal evenings for 7 to 13 days. Celebrity publishes "one to two" with no rule tied to length.

Can I wear jeans on a cruise?

In the daytime and at casual dinners, yes on most lines. Carnival names "jeans (no cut-offs)" as acceptable Cruise Casual for both men and women. Princess asks guests to avoid ripped jeans. Cut-off jeans are banned in the dining room by Carnival and Celebrity.

Can I bring an iron on a cruise?

No. Royal Caribbean, Celebrity, Carnival and Norwegian all prohibit clothing irons and garment steamers. Princess provides irons in its self-service laundry rooms. Pack fabrics that do not crease.

What shoes should I take on a cruise?

Two pairs you can stand in for three hours, already broken in, at least one with grip. Port days involve wet piers and boardwalks, a gangway at an angle that changes with the tide, and a great deal of standing still rather than walking.

Do cruise ships have laundry facilities?

It depends entirely on the line. Princess has self-service laundry rooms with irons provided. Royal Caribbean publishes that self-service laundry is not provided on its ships, as does Celebrity; Royal Caribbean's wash-and-fold is $34.99 per bag and Celebrity's is $59.99.

Where these facts come from

- Royal Caribbean, onboard dress code (https://www.royalcaribbean.com/faq/questions/generic-onboard-dress-code)
- Royal Caribbean, prohibited items policy (https://www.royalcaribbean.com/faq/questions/prohibited-items-onboard-policy)
- Royal Caribbean, onboard laundry and guest services (https://www.royalcaribbean.com/faq/questions/onboard-laundry-guest-services)
- Royal Caribbean, laundry service price list (PDF) (https://www.royalcaribbean.com/content/dam/royal/resources/pdf/laundry-service-price-list.pdf)
- Celebrity Cruises, onboard dress code (https://www.celebritycruises.com/faqs/onboard-dress-code)
- Celebrity Cruises, laundry service (https://www.celebritycruises.com/faqs/laundry-service)
- Carnival, dining room dress code (https://www.carnival.com/cruise-food/dining-room-dinner)
- Carnival, what to wear on a cruise (https://www.carnival.com/awaywego/cruising-fun/how-to-plan/what-to-wear-on-a-cruise)
- Carnival, prohibited items (https://www.carnival.com/help/prohibited-items)
- Carnival, wheelchair users and gangways (https://www.carnival.com/about-carnival/special-needs/wheelchair-users)
- Princess Cruises, pre-cruise FAQ (https://www.princess.com/faq/pre-cruise)
- Norwegian Cruise Line, what to pack (https://www.ncl.com/cruise-preparation/what-to-pack)
- Ketchikan Visitors Bureau, Creek Street (https://www.visitktn.com/plan/places-to-discover/creek-street/)
- NOAA NCEI, US Monthly Climate Normals 1991-2020 (https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/search/data-search/normals-monthly-1991-2020)

Ports change their rules and their prices. Check the official pages above before you sail.

About the "I" on this page. AI Cruise Granny is the AI twin of Cruise Granny, a real human being who actually sails. Every experience written here in the first person is hers. The AI twin is what writes it up, checks the facts against official sources and keeps it current. We tell you that openly on every page, because you should know who is talking to you. More about how this works.
