

Celebrity, Royal Caribbean cruise lines add one-price mixed drink packages

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More cruise lines add liquor to one-price drink packages

Cruisers like the value and convenience, lines say

Cruise lines are starting to sell mixed-drink packages that cover an entire cruise, helping travelers avoid sticker shock when they get their final onboard bill.

Earlier this year, Royal Caribbean International started testing mixed-drink packages on three ships — Grandeur of the Seas, Independence of the Seas and Legend of the Seas.

For one price paid onboard, guests can enjoy soda, beer, wine and mixed drinks without paying each time they order. A similar deal was already available for soda and wine, but not for drinks with liquor.

Royal's packages start at \$39 a day for beer and wines by the glass and go up to \$59 for beer, cocktails, premium spirits and wine by the glass, up to \$10 a serving.

Experts say the move in part answers consumer demand for a more "all-inclusive" cruise vacation.

For years, cruise lines have made money on "soda cards" for unlimited soft drinks, Coral Gables-based cruise industry consultant Rod McLeod said.

As that program's popularity grew, cruisers began asking for adult drinks in beverage packages, he said.

Last year, Celebrity Cruises did, rolling out beverage packages with alcohol on most ships, priced from \$44 per person or \$308 for a seven-night cruise.

Before, both lines offered packages with mixed drinks and sodas to private groups only.

In some quarters, however, these "all-inclusive" beverage packages are raising concern.

The International Cruise Victims Association, in a recent statement, condemned Royal Caribbean "for promoting the consumption of alcohol on their ships by offering unlimited drinks for one price."

"It's opening a door for tragedy," said Kendall Caver, the group's chairman, who points to FBI findings linking excessive drinking to ship-board crime.

Carver had earlier objected to Celebrity's packages.

Cruise line officials contend that there are limits on the number of alcoholic drinks guests receive. Sodas also are included in the packages.

"Unlimited is a misnomer," said Scott Steenrod, Celebrity's associate vice president for food and beverage operations. "We only serve one drink at a time, per transaction."

"If someone over-consumes alcohol, we stop serving them whether they're on the package or not", said

Gary Bald, a senior vice president in charge of safety and security issues at Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd., parent company for RCI and Celebrity.

At both lines, bartenders and waiters are trained to watch for over-consumption.

But some aren't certain these rules and policies are effective.

In 2006, Miami maritime lawyer Brett Rivkind sued on behalf of the family of a 15-year-old girl who fell overboard after being served by a bartender aboard a Costa Cruises ship. The bartender was fired. The suit was settled before reaching trial.

"Cruise lines have a lot of rules on paper — safety rules and others — but in reality are those rules being followed by employees on ships?" said Rivkind, who has represented cruise passengers for nearly 30 years.

Celebrity's Steenrod said the one-price drink options have been a hit with customers.

"It was a good bargain for us," said Janet Matheson of the \$54 per night package 18 family members and friends each purchased for a Celebrity Millennium cruise to Alaska in July.

Matheson said cocktails would have been more expensive if purchased individually onboard.

On Celebrity ships, beer ranges from \$4.50 to \$8, wine by the glass from \$5.50 to \$12, and cocktails or spirits from \$6 to \$12 per serving, a spokeswoman said.

"The big appeal of a beverage package is that the guest doesn't feel nickel-and-dimed every time they buy a drink," said Uf Tukel, co-president of [Delray Beach's iCruise.com](#), a division of WMPH Vacations.

It's also one less thing to worry about at the end of the trip, when bills come due for purchases not included in the ticket price.

Carolyn Spencer Brown, editor in chief at [CruiseCritic.com](#), said "all-you-can-drink" beverage packages work better on ships with "an older and more sedate audience."

"It's a bit risky for the mass market," where a younger, more energetic traveler may be more inclined to overdo it, Brown said.

Celebrity declined to say what percentage of guests purchase packages, but said they're growing in popularity.

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