



## Looking for Some Good Laughs? Take a Cruise Vacation as Cruise Lines are World's Largest Providers of Live Comedy

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As experienced cruisers know and first-timers quickly discover, there is something to laugh out loud about on the high seas. Some of the top stand-up comedians in the world come on board cruise ships to entertain.

Catch a comedy act on Carnival Cruise Line, Princess Cruises, British line P&O Cruises, P&O Cruises Australia or the three oceanliners of Cunard and you may recognize a comedian you've seen on TV or at a comedy club. Bonus: The shipboard shows are free.

Carnival Cruise Line alone hosts 24,000 performances a year by comics in intimate Punchliner Comedy Clubs on its 25 ships – making the cruise line the largest provider of live comedy in the world.

"Laughter is a universal language and our guests really love to get together and laugh," says Chris Nelson, director of entertainment for Carnival Cruise Line. "Visiting a comedy club is a popular entertainment option on board."

Every sailing has two to four comics performing as many as five shows a day. There are shows suitable for the family crowd as well as late-night adult performances (for age 18 and up) that are often hilariously racy. A comedy club manager introduces the comedians as waiters snake through the crowd with drinks.

Princess Cruises, soon to have 18 ships (the new Majestic Princess debuts in April), features about 250 comedians on its roster of headline performers. Robbie Printz, a fixture on the Boston comedy scene and a Princess Cruises headliner since 2004, was just named by passengers as the line's Entertainer of the Year – a tribute akin to winning a People's Choice Award at sea.

Comedians on Princess Cruises ships perform in the main theater as well as late-night in a lounge, and all the acts are family friendly, says Phil Kaler, the line's manager of guest entertainers. "What we look for are comics whose acts are contemporary without the need for profanity."

Printz's high-energy observational comedy often focuses on his young family. Example: "My wife is always on and off a diet and I never know her size. She's a 2, she's a 6, she's an 8, she's a 4, she's a 10..." He is booked to do 23 weeks on Princess Cruises ships this year. Like other comedians, he flies in for a few days, and may even perform on two ships in a week. Printz says it's a great gig.

"They pay well and they treat you well," he says. "You get to enjoy lots of great food, all for free. Also, I like the theater atmosphere, with professional sound and lighting. It's great compared to doing a bar room in Boston or Cleveland."

Travel is an added benefit. Printz's favorite ports include those in Alaska as well as Cozumel, Mexico.

In addition to offering regular employment, cruise ships are also a great place to hone your act, says Tommy Drake, a regular on Carnival Cruise Line.

"At the Punchliner Comedy Clubs, comics have the wonderful opportunity of doing multiple sets for the same crowd," Drake says. "By your last performance most of the audience has already seen you before and has made the choice to come back and see you again, so you can get away with more interesting material."

Caroline Picard, who has been performing on Carnival Cruise Line ships for four years, says she likes the fact that cruise ship crowds are some of the most diverse you'll find anywhere.

Comedians are accommodated in cabins with a view and enjoy guest privileges. You may run into your favorite performer at the pool or in the fitness center. Mingling with the crowd and being "famous" on the ship is part of the fun.

"It's great, I love meeting with passengers, taking pictures with them, and getting to know where they are from," Picard says. "The guests love meeting us, and I feel it's part of the experience to give them some of my time."

Some passengers enjoy the onboard comedy performances so much they start following the comics when they do gigs on land too, says Al Ernst, who has performed on Carnival Cruise Line ships for 24 years. He says he's made many friends on cruise ships.

Comedians get frequent positive mention when cruisers talk about their cruise vacations on social media and also get high marks in passenger surveys.

"It's an escape. Who doesn't like to laugh?" says Princess Cruises' Kaler.

The cruise lines focus on finding the right performers. In addition to working with talent agencies and checking out performances in comedy clubs and at festivals, Carnival Cruise Line welcomes tapes from seasoned comedians at [www.carnivalentertainment.com](http://www.carnivalentertainment.com).

Jokes about politics are typically verboten at sea as are cheesy cruise ship jokes. Since not all comedy translates universally, stand-up comics may be hired based on the passenger contingent and itinerary – you will find more Australian and New Zealand comics in the Pacific, more U.S. and Canadian comics on ships that cater to a North American crowd. When the audience is international and speaks multiple languages, the cruise lines may go more for visual acts, such as comedy magicians.

On the eight ships of British line P&O Cruises, stand-up comedy is a fundamental part of the entertainment program and takes a British stance.

"What our passengers like is slightly different than the Americans," says Paul Wright, director of entertainment for Carnival UK, which includes P&O Cruises and Cunard. "The Brits like comedy that reminds them of who they are and what they're doing and where they are from. It's very British-centric."

Wright estimates that about half the comedians who are regulars at British comedy clubs on land also do gigs on the P&O Cruises ships – as many as 150 comics on the cruise line's entertainment roster at any one time. The comics may be recognizable to guests from their appearances on British TV and on game shows.

"We expect them to be at the top of their game," Wright says. "We are cherry-picking the best comedians we can find."

On P&O Cruises ships, the comics do headline sets in front of a crowd of about 1,000 in the main theaters as well as late-night sets in bars where they are able to be "a little more cheeky," Wright says.

"The Brits like to enjoy something together. It's that joy of communal laughter," Wright says, adding that seeing comedians also brings bragging rights. "People like to get home from their cruise vacation and tell the gags they've heard the comic tell onboard. It's a bit of social currency."

Australians love a good laugh, and P&O Cruises Australia serves up comedy in partnership with the well-known Brisbane-based Sit Down Comedy Club. Top-flight stand-up comics perform in bars on each of the line's six ships.

For those looking for an immersive comedy experience, P&O Cruises Australia also hosts several Comedy Cruises each year. These themed sailings feature five or six comics doing shows, plus activities such as comedy workshops where guests can learn tricks of the trade and a Comedy Gong Show where passengers of all ages can test their comedic talents.

Comedy is also part of the entertainment lineup on the venerable Cunard line, where international comedians are featured as headliners in the Royal Court Theatre, performing slapstick, observational humor or visual comedy.

In addition to its complimentary line-up, Carnival Cruise Line also hosts superstar performers such as Jay Leno and Jeff Foxworthy as part of its Carnival LIVE concert series in select ports (tickets required).

Top Princess Cruises entertainer Printz says he often hears from guests that comedy has enhanced their cruise experience.

"People say to me after a show, I haven't laughed that hard in a long time," Printz says, adding with a laugh: "And I tell them, well, you need to get out more!"

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