

Are you thinking about cruising on Holland America? Or maybe you've done one or two cruises and felt like you've missed out on something. You're not alone. We just finished a 28-day cruise on the Holland America Westerdam. And these are some of the things that weren't necessarily covered in other videos or they were very outdated. So, let's fix that. Hi, I'm Lea, and this is your 2025 guide to cruising on Holland, including some tips, tricks, and things that will help you have a more frustration-free cruise.

[Music] One of the first things to know about booking a Holland America cruise is actually when you are booking the cruise itself. They have "have it all" and they have "have it all early booking". They're the same price according to Holland. So if you have the ability to book "Have it all early booking", You are going to get a slew of benefits including prepaid gratuities, the premium beverage package, the premium internet package, as well as shore excursion credits. That's a big deal and adds up to big dollars. So, watch for that. I will post the direct link in the description that will tell you the current sailings that are available for have it all early booking. Normally available in first 90 days, sometimes goes a little bit beyond that.

Next, if you're a mariner, you probably already know this, but when you book, there's additional OBC that can be applied. If you're brand new, don't worry about that. Know that that's a future benefit.

If you have shore excursion credit, that is one of the onboard credit things that you can book early. So, make sure that you know how much you have and get out there and book when they open up so you can get the best excursions available for your cruise. online discounts.

Holland is one of those lines that does not discount things once you're on board. So, if you see an online discount available prior to boarding for a laundry, for an internet upgrade, anything else and you want to grab that, you will be paying for that with a credit card. If you have a lot of OBC and you want to move it once you're on board, you can. However, you have to pay the higher envoy price for that.

Make sure that you know your OBC specialty dining- watch the clock. They're a little arbitrary with this, but it simply states 6 to 9 months before your cruise. You can book those specialty dining credits. You do want to pay attention to that and jump on it so that you can get either a table for two or four or the time that you're looking for. The longer you wait, the less options that are available to you. So, grab those. Also, if you want to book more specialty dining than what you have credits for, you can do that. You can also do that on board, but you will pay for the additional cost. And I will put here's the cost for the additional specialty restaurants as of our cruise in October 2025.

Next up, Club Orange. You need to know what this is when you're booking because one of the biggest benefits of purchasing Club Orange is when you're booking, it's an upgrade to your room. Club Orange is basically a basket of benefits that pretty much get you treated almost like a four and five star mariner. Priority dining-There's a special line for you to go in. There are extra perks on the menu. There's priority boarding. So there's a bucket of things that are included, but one of the biggest items is being able to upgrade within the same category of room. On our cruise from Seattle to Japan and around Japan, we saved over \$2,000 by purchasing Club Orange for about \$850, allowing us to book and pay at the lower level for a V room and be able to book a better room in that category. I will be doing an entire separate video on Club Orange and what may benefit. So, check into that when you book.

Let's talk drink packages. Holland has three drink packages. There's the quench package which is non-alcoholic. There is signature which are drinks up to \$11 and then the elite package are drinks up to

\$15. The early booking bonus as we said earlier of “have it all early booking” gets you the elite package. If you have just “have it all” that gets you the signature package. So you need to know the difference. If a drink costs more than your limit, you're \$11 or \$15, you just pay the difference. So that's nice plus tip.

What counts towards your limit? So, if you look at Holland marketing materials, it will tell you there is a 15 drink limit on both packages. But the twist is that the elite package only counts your **alcoholic** drinks versus the signature package counts **everything**. So, if you drink a lot of water or specialty coffee, you may want to look at that um elite upgrade.

How to track your drink count. This was interesting because there is not anywhere on the app where you can track how many drinks you've had. So, you would either have to go through and count if you tipped - or there's no way to do it. We were told you either have to go to a bartender and ask them what's your total for the day or you can dial 90 from your phone and they will give that to you. But they did say that they would be looking at a future app update to help with this.

Happy hour. Yes, they have good happy hours. So, in the ocean bar, this is Vista class on the Westerdam. Happy hour was from 3p to 4p and 9p to 10p only at the Ocean Bar. The Gallery bar, which is down by the casino, was from 6p to 7p. So that's three different happy hours you could go to each night. The catch is that it is 50% off drinks up to \$11. That's it. You cannot, and I confirmed this with multiple bartenders, cannot order a \$12 drink and think I'm going to get \$5.50 (half of \$11) off that. I am not. So you have to stick with what is included basically in the signature package.

Where can I get free drinks on board? Well, in this case, you pretty much had to go to a presentation like Effy had mimosa mornings or you would have to go to like an art show and sometimes they would have champagne.

Your mariner status, if you're one, might get you a couple coupons, but you probably are already aware of that.

If you do a winery tour with the ship, they will allow you to bring one bottle back without a corkage fee. But Holland is one of those lines that if you try to bring wine on board, they're going to charge you a \$20 per per bottle corkage fee and they get to limit how much you bring on board. We did ask the beverage services manager about why this rule. He said it had to do with taxes and going to these different countries as well as affecting the tips of employees. So, it's arbitrary, but it's going to be up to boarding how many they're going to let you bring on board and pay that corkage fee.

All right, let's move on to coffee. There are two places to get specialty coffee. One is the Lido Pool Bar. They have a really nice coffee setup there in the morning and they can make anything that can be made upstairs in the Crows Nest on 10. It's great to have two different areas to be able to get specialty coffees. Lido Buffet also had drip coffee available. I think we were up there as early as 4:30a or 5a one day. They do not have to-go cups, however, which is kind of a pain. We actually travel with insulated mugs when we are cruising now. We can fill those up, come back to our room, and relax.

Lastly, we had hot pot in the drawer under our bed. When I set it out, our room steward went ahead and did a tea setup, but we also travel with just instant coffee, individual packs, and then we could make coffee in our room on our own. That may be an option for you as well.

Water strategy on Holland. Holland is one of those lines that does not put refillable water bottles in the room. They do not give you a water bottle that you can go fill elsewhere. So they sell canned water. They do not allow plastic bottles of water on board. Even if we went into port and we bought a plastic bottle, we had to throw it away before we boarded. One of the smart things we saw someone do is she had a collapsible six-pack beer carrier and she carried it around first as soon after she boarded she put six waters in there and started her stock because she knew she wasn't going to get to her 15 count on boarding day and she was able to stay ahead of the water situation if you're a person that needs water on a regular basis. Those are my drink tips.

Let's talk about dining. Early risers, you're covered. The Crow's Nest actually opens at 6:00 a.m. They had coffee, specialty coffees, as well as like croissants and some small bites up there as well. The Lido Buffet had cereal and milk. So, if you got jet lag and you're up before 6a, feel free to go down there and get some milk and cereal.

Online ordering thru the app. The dive-in bar, they serve burgers and chicken down by the pool. They actually have a section on the app where you can order from the app and it'll tell you exactly what time they open and boom, you can place an order. That actually worked really well. Room service ordering, however, was not available on our entire 28-day cruise on the Westerdam thru the app. So phone works just fine on that one, but you can at least order from the Dive In Bar on the app.

For menus, what's nice about Holland is they had them updated by, fairly early every morning. They're on your TV or they're on your app and they were really easy to find- right on the front section on the main homepage, you can swipe over to either Lido or main dining room and see all the menus that are available for that day.

Now, one thing you need to watch for while you're looking at those menus, they have brunches and these will only be held on sea days, but if you see the hours of the dining room are 9:30 to 12:30, that's your first flag that there is a brunch that day. We almost missed it a couple different times because normal sea day lunch is from noon to 2. Those brunches are usually reflective of where you're sailing. We had an Alaskan brunch- We had an Asian brunch. We had a couple of them. It is not a buffet. It is a sitdown menu that had both breakfast and lunch items.

Next, the other thing you want to watch for is afternoon tea on sea days. They do not do them every sea day, but they were done phenomenally. They're held at 3:00p and they had everything from English tea, Victorian tea, cupcakes, Asian tea, and a Dutch tea, which is great fun. So, make sure you watch for those. Those will be in the Current and we saw them sometimes on the itinerary on your phone, but they weren't anywhere else in the um listed anywhere else. So, just pay attention for those on a sea day. Look specifically for 3:00p.

Next up is specialty dining. If you didn't see the first section and you're shooting right for dining, here is the pricing for additional specialty dining that's available that you can book um on board as well. Note that the Morioto by Sea and the Seafood Boil are only going to be offered one time per cruise. So that you want to jump on if that's something that you want to do.

Lastly, prior to your cruise, you are able to select a set dining time of either 5:30p or 7:30p, and those are up on the third floor, so the upper floor of the main dining room. We actually selected anytime dining, not knowing what our rhythm was going to be. But after about a week or so, we were very consistently

arriving for dinner at 6:30. We were being seated all over the dining room, of course. And I know you can do this on many lines, but specifically they allowed us to get a set table time for 6:30 on the second floor in the same section where we could sit with the same servers every night. So if you find yourself having that level of consistency, just check with them and see if they'll do that for you. It made our cruise so much more enjoyable.

Next up, laundry. Holland America does not have self-service on board laundry. You either have to pack enough that you don't need to do laundry if it's a short trip, or you could to bring a scrubber bag and do your own clothes, or you need to look at one of their many laundry packages, which we're actually very fond of. Let me walk you through those. They have a bag where you can do wash and fold for \$35. We were able to get about 25 things in here. I know some of you are all master packers, but about 25 items is what fit in here. The same bag is only \$5 more if you want them to wash, fold, AND press. Highly recommend so you don't have a bunch of wrinkled shirts coming back. They hang up everything really nicely, too. So, for us, the package for our 28-day cruise was \$336 for wash, fold, press, which works out to about \$12 a day. They came back within 24 hours every day. We set our bag out on our bed, put the form out. It was a beautiful job done. If you want to take some of the pressure off and not have to worry about it, it was they do a wonderful job. Probably the best laundry at sea if they could figure out a tagline for that.

Now, one thing I will mention about four to five months before our cruise, there was a discount out there on the website. It was about 15% off where we could have prepaid for our laundry on our credit card because remember on Holland, onboard credit can be used once you're on board. Okay? I could have done that and paid less and prepaid it on my credit card, but I really wanted to use my OBC. Even if I would have went down and had them credit it if I purchased it and I tried to credit and have it move to OBC, they are going to charge you the higher amount of what it is on board. So, just remember that and then weigh out the math of what's going to work for you. But, their laundry service is incredible on board.

All right, so next up, best topic yet, entertainment. And this is where Holland shines in my opinion. Let's start with the orange party. Holland is a Dutch line. What's the orange party? Well, orange is a color of Dutch royalty. So, there will be an orange party on your cruise. Everything from Macarena lines, orange drinks, Dutch snacks. It's so fun, especially if you have a decent contingent of Dutch people on board because they know all the songs. It's a great time. All you need to do just bring one little thing orange. Sunglasses, a boa, whatever. Just grab something orange. You won't regret that one. It's a fun time.

There's a couple of other pop-up events that you don't want to miss. One of them is the Lido Fair. It's basically the pool area set up like a carnival. A lot of other ships do this, too. And you're playing games like bag toss or ladder ball or, you know, you're throwing trying to get ring toss in the bottle. Again, carnival games. But here's my tip. As you're playing these games, you only play for about an hour. As you're playing and you're winning your tickets, once you've won tickets, you want to immediately tear your part off and take the other part and put it in the raffle bin because unlike a lot of other events like this where they do the drawing at the end, they actually do the drawing throughout. So, get playing early, get your tickets in early, and you've got a better chance of winning some of the prizes. And they were really good. One was like a replica of the ship. They had some specialty dining credits, a bottle of wine-so get them in early. It's a lot of fun.

Another fun event that they'll do is called Night Under the Stars. And they specifically said they only do these on longer itineraries. They don't do them every time, but if you see it, it's fun that you don't need to bring anything extra for it. There's like beautiful candles floating in the pool. They have live music. They'll bring around appetizers. They'll have a drink special of the night. It's fun. It's fun. So, kind of watch for that one.

One of the biggest things with Holland that we love is called the music walk. And Holland's known for their live music. So, I want to explain what this looks like. On the Vista class ship like the Westerdam, you have a Rolling Stone rock room. You have Billboard on board. You also have a spot where they play classical music. There's a ton of music every night. I'll show you this is what you want to look for in your current this little schedule right here because it'll tell you what's happening each night. The schedules change because they give people the time off. They adjust them based on other things that are going on board. So, it's not a set schedule. That's what you need to know.

If they have a regional soloist, go check that person out early in your cruise. We became groupies of ours because she was so good. As well as the talent in the Rolling Stone rock room on this particular cruise. They've been phenomenal.

On Westerdam right now, as of October 2025, there are two pianos on board, but only one piano player. I know there are people on other Holland ships where the two pianos are back and they're doing dueling pianos, so I'm hoping that comes back at some point. But anyway, music is fantastic.

The shows in the theater are also what's great about Holland. at 7:30p and 9:30p. So, you have an early seating and a late seating, which is fantastic for those of us who, you know, like to mix up our evenings a little bit. The first part of the cruise during the crossing, we had comedians, we had magicians, we had singers, we had people playing like an accordion, making it sound like a whole orchestra, like very talented people. But once we got to Japan, they onboarded a production crew. This will be our third show tonight and they are phenomenal. They did a show last night called "In the Swing". They're fantastically talented, so just pay attention to that and make sure you know when the Showtimes are.

Lastly, this is a little tip, the trivia on board in particular, and I know there may be some other games that award these, but the prizes given are these little wooden tulips that are specific to the ship that you're on. So, our ours is a light blue one on this ship. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to win one yet. Every time we go to trivia, like whoever wins has a perfect score. I kind of gave up on that after a while. But if you're competitive, you could also check with the entertainment director and see if there's any other games that they may um be providing those as prizes. They don't sell them in the store. So, the only way to get one is to win one. And that is Holland Entertainment.

Onboard credit. Holland America has changed their rules recently. Here we are October 2025. So, it's a little dicier to try to get cash back when you've got refundable onboard credit available to you. What we did was we used the casino. We were able to put a credit from our refundable OBC into a slot machine. Doug gambled for just a couple minutes and then he was able to cash that out (You're mileage may vary here!). So, again, a lot of rules, new rules around whether you can get cash back or not, but we were able to get cash back doing that. the new policy will basically send you to a third party. They'll send you an email. You've got to input your banking details into a third party and you'll get a credit that way, which if you prefer to do that, but we just wanted to tell you there's a little way around that.

Second, we used our American Express Platinum Cruise Booking Benefit, we used AARP, and we also have our Carnival shareholder benefit. Those were the three things additional that we used to get non-refundable OBC that we were able to use on this cruise, but make sure you're checking with your travel agent to get all the different options available to you for additional onboard credit.

All right, just two additional things I have here under miscellaneous. The first is excursion tickets are delivered digitally only. You will not get anything in an envelope with tickets in it. It will be on your app. In our case, Doug's tickets kind of popped up automatically. Mine didn't. So, we did a little video here that will show you where you can find your excursion tickets. If you're like me, you like to have them ready before you walk down to the world stage. So, just know that.

Let's talk about the internet really quick. So, if you have "have it all", you're going to get what's called the surf package. If you have "have it all early booking", you are going to get the premium package. And everything else from there is an upgrade. So, I had the premium package. I was able to do pretty much, Facebook, email, Messenger calls and YouTube. I could play YouTube videos, not a problem. That was not bucketed under the streaming service. We upgraded Doug's phone to streaming so we could watch Hulu and Netflix and do more from the actual streaming sites. All of it worked pretty well. I would say on the crossing, we got dumped a few times here and there. Not too bad. The next step for the packages are multi-device where you can have up to four people connected. So the upsell is real here. Something to consider is that depending on how many people you have in your room and what your needs are, you might be able to have one person have the internet package and buy the multi-device and then you all share that pricing. We've seen we've heard some people say that that actually might be a little bit better for your internet access at sea.

We've also been testing an ESIM called Gig Sky who have a cruise only package where you can turn on internet connectivity while you're at sea. Doug is going to be doing a separate video on eims in port and at sea that should be out soon. If you're interested in looking at a comparison or if you found any of this helpful, we would really appreciate a like and subscribe as well.

We know that there are a ton of diehard Holland America four and five star mariners that you just love this line. If we have missed anything, I have the ability to put a little info button in. If you've got a tip or a trick that you'd like to share, please put it in the comments. We'd love to share that with everyone. But this video truly is from a person who's just completed their third Holland America cruise. These are the things that I feel will help you have a more enjoyable cruise. Thanks for watching.