

Owners' Observations on Cruise Exchanges; RCI Response



RCI's cruise offers are just more of the same spin that RCI makes about points and rentals in general. Misleading. I have checked the RCI cruise offers against several cruise websites. Hands down you can get better deals at other places.

C. M.

Looking at the prices RCI charges for a cruise exchange, I find it is much better to book a cruise at a discounted price. You can often get great rates through RCI or other travel agencies that specialize in cruises purchasing without using an exchange.

Jennifer Dickey, Toronto, Canada

The RCI cruise exchange is another gimmick. Every cruise exchange I have looked into I find I can do better through my travel agent. I am surprised that anyone would take a cruise exchange.

Gordon

I did one exchange for a cruise to the Mexican Riviera. I think I could have had the cruise for the same price without giving up a week at the resort if we had shopped around. So I have not traded for cruises after that one experience. I have had some very good offers from II for purchase of cruises—a 7-day Panama, Belize, Costa Rica one for \$800, in an upscale cabin.

Roberta Freese, Anchorage, AK

I tried to book a cruise and it was cheaper to go through a travel agent than RCI.

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I am Travel Agent and I have said from day one that exchanging for a cruise is a rip off! Glad someone finally agrees. Do the Math and call a reliable travel agent. One who "remembers" to tell you that you need a passport! I have been asked at the

last minute "to fix a number of cruise vacations booked on line and one exchange, and have to say "I am sorry. Bite the bullet. Pay the last minute fees and go enjoy yourself"

Travel Agents do not cost you more and they can save you thousands.

Patricia Sumpter, Surprise, Arizona

I can't think of anything more insane than using your timeshare for a cruise. The "additional charge," ostensibly for food, is often more than I have paid for a whole cruise. If you are going to cruise, subscribe to a good cruise site. I have yet to pay more than \$100 a day per person for an outside cabin, and I have cruised the Mexican Riviera, Alaska, and the Panama Canal, all cruises being either on Princess or Holland America.

Phyllis Warner

I have seriously considered exchanging a week for a cruise and have done several comparisons, and every time I compare rates of cruises by RCI and direct from the cruise lines, there is rarely more than a \$50 – \$100 savings and that is without the

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exchange fee. Now, if I were to book the maximum number of cabins through RCI (6, I believe, with only 1 exchange fee), that would end up being a significant savings. But not for just one cabin (especially as even lower rates than from the cruise line are available from cruise travel agents.

Maggie Gardner

If one strictly looks at the retail or highest possible cost for a cruise and then makes an exchange for that cruise plus the actual additional costs, it would become

quite apparent that they may have come out about even. Most cruises can be purchased directly with any cruise line for less than the cost of an exchange, exchange fee plus maintenance, plus prorated purchase cost of a time share, and then the additional cost charged for a cruise.

My wife and I have done two major cruises of 18 days in the last 3 years with Princess in Southeast Asia. Each time, we have priced out a cruise through RCI, II, and ICE gallery and it came up higher than making a direct reservation with the cruise line. Each party in the transaction has to get their profit, and it's a bad deal or the time share owner as far as we are concerned.

I am sure others have seen the same thing when doing an evaluation, yet I am sure it does work for some people, just doesn't work for the shoppers, and we shop around all the time.

John Beyer

With the deep discounts available on all cruise lines, I can't imagine it making sense to use your weeks or points for an exchange.

Donna Pedace

We were looking at a cruise through RCI to Mexico. They advertised in the directory a cruise that we wanted starting at \$777. When we called, they said that with an exchange week and paying an exchange fee, we could get up to 4 cabins for this price.

In our case, we also needed to extend the week we wanted to use. So for the exchange fee of \$189 plus the extension fee of \$99 plus giving them a Gold Crown Week for exchange, we could get the week we wanted. We chose an upgraded cabin

over the one advertised.

We asked about the deposit, which would have been \$1800 now and the balance at a later date. We were advised we would call back after we discussed it. Something didn't seem just right.

About 15 minutes later, the RCI representative called back to see if we decided yet. He also said that he talked with his supervisor and we could drop the exchange and extension fee, and buy the same week from RCI at the same advertised price.

That raised further questions. So we checked several cruise websites and found that the same cruise was available at the same price that RCI advertised, with a 50% reduction in the deposit.

It appears that a cruise exchange with RCI is not the deal they claim it to be. They get your week for exchange, an exchange fee and you buy the cruise with the impression of a good deal when in actuality you can buy the same cruise outright without losing your week and without paying an exchange fee. You can also buy the same cruise at several websites, and have a lesser deposit fee and not lose anything.

Needless to say, we purchased the cruise through a travel agency we had used for two previous cruises, and still have our exchange week and exchange fee.

Norb and Brigitte Woolsey

I just got off the phone with a gal from RCI who called me about an exciting new cruise offer; "exciting" is her word, not mine! As my husband and I cruise regularly, I was interested in hearing about the offer. In the past, I have called RCI and II about their cruise prices with the deposit of a week. I found that the small credit they gave you toward a cruise made no

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While on an exchange to the Westgate Emerald Pointe Resort in Holister, MO, Katherine Helm of Sellersville, PA took this photograph of her husband Paul E. Helm reading his TimeSharing Today. She reports that it was a wonderful place to stay.

sense at all. I could rent my unit for twice what they were offering and also find a better price than they quoted for the cruise. The new offer I heard about today is that you do not have to deposit a week and for "only" \$2,295 (not including port charges and taxes) you can book a cruise from a long list over the next 2 years and, in addition, get a week at a timeshare resort. I was told that any resort in the system, regardless of size, time of year, rating of resort was available to use. (I doubt that!)

When I asked for a price on a 2 week European cruise we are going on next May, I was told there was an "extra charge" for that one; the extra charge came to over \$1,000, more than we are currently being quoted! Shame on you, RCI; these tactics will lose you many members!

Elaine Lefebvre

Editors note: We send all of the foregoing comments to RCI and received the following in response.

Maximize Your RCI Membership: Vacation on Land and by Sea

Cruising is the fastest-growing segment of the leisure industry and RCI Cruise Exchange provides RCI subscribing members access to the best cruise experiences at great prices. With more than 100,000 cruises booked through RCI Cruise Exchange in the past five years, and feedback citing the cooperative and courteous help from RCI Guides, it is evident that RCI subscribing members are enjoying this added flexibility.

Other Cruise Deals – Things to Consider

While booking a cruise through other methods may seem like a better approach, there are several things to look for when searching for a cruise.

Any one specific cruise can have as many as 25 different price categories, depending on cabin location and size. Add to this mix the fact that cruise lines can change their rates from day to day based on pricing initiatives and inventory availability, and it's easy to see how confusion can ensue – and how that confusion can be used to the retailer's advantage. When shopping for cruises and comparing cruise prices, it is essential to make sure that the prices being compared are for exactly the same accommodations on precisely the same cruise, including the same dates.

In addition, when booking online, it is vital to walk through the entire booking process to ensure that the advertised sale price carries through to become the final sale price and that offers have not expired or are not subject to additional charges (such as taxes and port fees) or special conditions.

RCI Cruise Exchange – The Details

In making the Cruise Exchange benefit available to its members, RCI strives to provide an optimum selection of cruise itineraries, destinations and ships. RCI's Cruise Exchange program benefits RCI members by allowing them to exchange their week or RCI Points® to

pay for a portion of the published cruise price. If they prefer to hold on to their week or RCI Points, they can still purchase a cruise at member preferred rates which, because the program has agreements with more than 50 cruise lines, are among the best available.

Key benefits of booking a cruise through RCI include:

- 1 RCI member preferred rates
- 2 Savings of up to \$1200 per cabin
- 3 A selection of more than 50 cruise lines
- 4 Thousands of itinerary choices
- 5 No blackout dates (pending availability)

With the option to travel among more than 2,800 ports, popular destinations include Alaska, Mexico, Caribbean, Hawaii, South America, Mediterranean, Australia, Northern Europe, Northeast United States, Northwest United States, Arctic and Antarctic Circles, Indonesia and the Far East.

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