



Tampa Cruise Departure Guide

Everything You Need to Know Before You Sail

Tampa is one of Florida's most convenient and scenic cruise departure ports. Located along the beautiful **Hillsborough River** in downtown Tampa, the port offers easy access, modern cruise terminals, outstanding restaurants, beautiful waterfront parks, and world-class attractions. Its central location also makes it an excellent choice for travelers driving from across the Southeast.

Whether you're planning a Caribbean cruise or a longer adventure, arriving a day or two early allows you to experience everything Tampa has to offer while ensuring a relaxed start to your vacation.



About Port Tampa Bay



Port Tampa Bay is Florida's largest seaport by cargo tonnage and one of the state's busiest cruise ports. Located in downtown Tampa, the terminals are just minutes from hotels, restaurants, and popular attractions.

Passengers enjoy:

- Easy interstate access
- Convenient downtown location
- Modern cruise terminals
- Nearby hotels
- Walkable waterfront
- Plenty of dining and entertainment
- Short drive from the airport

One of the highlights of sailing from Tampa is cruising beneath the iconic **Sunshine Skyway Bridge**, one of the most recognizable bridges in the United States.



Cruise Lines Sailing from Tampa

Tampa offers a wide variety of cruise options throughout the year.

Cruise lines include:

- Carnival Cruise Line
- Royal Caribbean International
- Norwegian Cruise Line
- Celebrity Cruises

Popular itineraries include:

- Western Caribbean
- Bahamas
- Panama Canal (select sailings)
- Mexico (select itineraries)

Common ports of call include:

- Cozumel
- Costa Maya
- Roatán
- Belize City
- Harvest Caye
- Grand Cayman
- Key West (select sailings)

Because ships must pass beneath the Sunshine Skyway Bridge, Tampa is typically home to midsize ships rather than the largest mega-ships.



The Sunshine Skyway Bridge Experience



One of the most memorable moments of a Tampa cruise happens shortly after departure—or just before returning home.

Cruise ships carefully navigate beneath the **Sunshine Skyway Bridge**, with what appears to be only a small amount of clearance above the ship.

It's an unforgettable sight and a favorite experience for many cruisers.

Getting to Tampa

Driving

Tampa is easily reached via:

- I-75
- I-4
- I-275
- Florida's Turnpike

Approximate driving times:

- Orlando – 1½ hours
 - Sarasota – 1 hour
 - Fort Myers – 2 hours
 - Jacksonville – 3½ hours
 - Miami – 4½ hours
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Flying

Tampa International Airport (TPA)

One of the nation's highest-rated airports.

Located approximately:

20–25 minutes from the cruise terminals.

Major airlines include:

- Southwest
 - Delta
 - American
 - United
 - JetBlue
 - Spirit
 - Frontier
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Transportation

Transportation options include:

- Uber
- Lyft
- Taxi
- Cruise line transfers
- Hotel shuttles (select hotels)
- Private transportation

Because the airport is close to downtown, transfers are generally quick and affordable.

Parking

Port Tampa Bay offers convenient parking close to the cruise terminals.

Parking options include:

- Multi-level garages
- Surface lots
- Accessible parking
- Security monitoring

Many nearby hotels also offer:

- Park-and-cruise packages
 - Shuttle transportation
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Hotels Near the Cruise Port

Popular cruise hotels include:

Downtown Tampa

- Embassy Suites by Hilton Tampa Downtown
- JW Marriott Tampa Water Street
- Hilton Tampa Downtown
- Hampton Inn Tampa Downtown

Near the Airport

- Renaissance Tampa International Plaza
- Hyatt Place Tampa Airport
- Hilton Garden Inn Tampa Airport

Many hotels offer:

- Cruise parking
- Shuttle service
- Airport transportation

Where to Eat Before Your Cruise

Tampa offers an incredible variety of dining options.

Popular restaurants include:

- Columbia Restaurant (Ybor City)
- Ulele
- Armature Works Food Hall
- Jackson's Bistro
- Sparkman Wharf

Don't miss:

- Cuban sandwiches
- Deviled crab
- Fresh Gulf seafood
- Florida grouper
- Key Lime Pie

Things to Do Before Your Cruise



Tampa Riverwalk

One of the city's most popular attractions.

Enjoy:

- Waterfront parks
 - Restaurants
 - Museums
 - Public art
 - Scenic walking paths
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Ybor City

Tampa's historic Latin Quarter.

Known for:

- Cuban heritage
 - Handmade cigars
 - Historic architecture
 - Restaurants
 - Nightlife
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Florida Aquarium

One of the country's top aquariums and located just minutes from the cruise terminals.

Busch Gardens Tampa Bay

Perfect for travelers spending an extra day or two before their cruise.

Features:

- Thrill rides
 - Animal encounters
 - Live entertainment
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ZooTampa at Lowry Park

A family favorite featuring animals from around the world.

Clearwater Beach

About 45 minutes away and consistently ranked among America's best beaches.



Weather Throughout the Year

Winter (Dec–Feb)

- Highs: 68–75°F
- Pleasant weather
- Cool evenings

Spring (Mar–May)

- Highs: 75–86°F
- Sunny and comfortable

Summer (Jun–Aug)

- Highs: 88–93°F
- Hot and humid
- Afternoon thunderstorms

Fall (Sep–Nov)

- Highs: 75–87°F
- Warm temperatures
- Lower humidity later in the season



Hurricane Season

Official season:

June 1 – November 30

Peak activity:

- August
- September
- October

Cruise lines monitor Gulf weather carefully and may adjust itineraries when necessary.

Travel insurance is highly recommended.



Embarkation Day Tips

Before leaving for the terminal, make sure you have:

- ✓ Passport or approved identification

- ✓ Boarding documents
- ✓ Cruise luggage tags
- ✓ Medications
- ✓ Carry-on essentials
- ✓ Travel insurance information

Plan to arrive during your assigned boarding window and allow extra time during busy weekends.

Premium Travel Group Tip

Tampa is one of our favorite departure ports because it's easy to navigate and offers plenty to see and do before your cruise. We recommend arriving at least one day early to stroll the Riverwalk, explore historic Ybor City, or visit Busch Gardens or the Florida Aquarium. And don't miss the unforgettable experience of sailing beneath the Sunshine Skyway Bridge—it's one of the most memorable departures in cruising!

Continue Planning Your Cruise

Continue preparing for your vacation with our helpful guides:

- Vacation Packing Guide
 - Caribbean Vacation Planning Guide
 - Western Caribbean Vacation Guide
 - Eastern Caribbean Vacation Guide
 - Southern Caribbean Vacation Guide
 - When to Visit the Caribbean
 - Cruise Port Guides
 - Cruise Departure Guides
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Why Sail from Tampa?

Tampa offers the perfect balance of convenience, attractions, and value. With an award-winning airport, a vibrant downtown, beautiful waterfront, and easy access to Gulf Coast beaches, it's an outstanding place to begin your cruise. Whether you're a first-time cruiser or a seasoned traveler, Tampa provides a relaxed and enjoyable embarkation experience with plenty of opportunities to extend your vacation before or after your sailing.

Premium Travel Group Tip: If you're sailing from Tampa, consider adding an extra day to visit nearby Clearwater Beach or St. Petersburg. It's a great way to turn your cruise into an even more memorable Florida getaway.