

Travelog
A Western Caribbean Cruise
On the Carnival Miracle

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1 Introduction

Patty and I recently took a cruise on the Carnival Miracle. We took the trip for our one-year wedding anniversary. We did not have the money to take a honeymoon when we first got married, so we decided to wait a year. We knew we wanted to take a cruise for our honeymoon early on. We wanted to avoid the stress that came with planning and carrying out your own trip - with the planes, trains, automobiles, tickets, times, routes, ups, downs, highs, lows, and all that jazz.

It was all worth the wait! We had a wonderful time on the Miracle. It is a great thing to get away from the normal worries and stresses of daily working life. The sights, sounds, tastes, and smells of the trip were exotic and unique. It was an experience we will remember the rest of our lives.

We thought it would be a good idea to write down our experiences for others to read. We had a couple reasons for this. First, we have many friends that are considering a cruise as a possible future vacation. We want to write down our observations, tips and recommendations to help them make informed decisions. Second, there were so many interesting things that happened on the trip, both in port and on the ship, we wanted to write down as many stories as possible so we could remember as much as possible. When you have so many stories to tell to your friends, you wonder if you forgot to tell this or that person a particular story. Here we have written down the definitive account of our trip.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses the practical aspects of cruising and what to consider before going on a cruise. Section 3 discusses what the cruise was like, including the food, the people, and what it looked like. Section 4 discusses our shore excursions. It tells our stories, what was fun and what was not. Section 5 is a compilation of our comments and tips from our cruise experience. If you want to know the tricks only someone who has been on a cruise will know - this is the spot!

2 Practical Concerns

One of the big attractions of going on a cruise is that you need to do very little planning. All you do is get to the port on time, get on the boat, and let them take care of you. So going on a cruise must be all happiness, candy, and cute little duckies in fifi pajamas, right? Unfortunately, there are still

some things you'll have to think about up front.

Some questions you may have include: "How much is this REALLY going to cost?", "Can we take whatever we like off of the boat?", "How big a hassle is it to get on and off the boat?"

2.1 Traveling to the Ship

Our travel agent set up all of the air and ground transportation to the ship. Delta Airlines apparently has a deal with Carnival, and airfare was built into the Carnival bill we received. We also took a bus Carnival provided from the airport to the ship (and vice-versa).

There is one thing about getting on and off the boat: be ready for long waiting periods punctuated by frantic activity! When we arrived in Tampa, we learned from the Carnival agents waiting for us that the ship had come in late due to bad weather. We waited in the airport for about three hours. After we got on the bus, we arrived at the cruise ship terminal.

Here we were greeted by a gaggle of porters. It was still unclear to us if we had to give our luggage to them or not. Yes. You do. We found that out when we got our luggage and moved away from the fray a bit (all the porters were busy with other bags). A supervisor(?) yelled at us "What are you doing? Give your bags to the porters!" We still did not know our room number, so they threw us a manifest, and we had to scramble to find our names and correctly write the room number listed under our name on our baggage. The entire process was not fun.

After our bags were unceremoniously put in a huge pile of other bags, we waited in a line that reached outside of the terminal and around the block. As a rough estimate, I would guess the line was a quarter to a half mile long. After getting inside the building, we had to wait in line to have our travel documents inspected. After that, we had to wait in the terminal until the boat was ready to accept passengers. This took a while. Even when it was ready, they called passengers according to a numbering system and it took a significant amount of time to get called to get on the boat. Oh yes, and then you had to get your picture taken - one last hurtle before you could get on that gangway.

All of this waiting adds up to a very long day of traveling. Be ready for it. Liquids, snacks, and lots of portable entertainment are must-haves.

There will be lots of other people waiting with you. Many of them will not be as well prepared as you. These people will be getting bent out of

shape over silly things during the various waiting processes. Be patient and try not to be one of them.

2.2 Getting Off the Ship

Getting off of the ship was similar to getting on it. It was stressful and took a long time. The process begins early in the morning, when customs arrives on the boat. If you meet certain criteria, you have to get up early so they can inspect your stuff. In our case, we thought we met the criteria - but one of the customs agent signed off on our little form while we were still standing in line. This was one of those instances when communication was a poor between guests and the crew. We will talk more about that later.

Your luggage is taken away from you the evening before, and you have to find it in a huge warehouse when you get off the ship. After finding your luggage, you have to go through customs again (they look at your customs form and should just wave you through), leave the terminal, make sure you are on a bus and then deal with the airport. Be patient, just as you were patient getting on the boat. Be prepared for waiting and wading through big crowds.

If you are agoraphobic, a cruise may not be for you.

2.2.1 Delta Airlines' Kiosks

Unfortunately, one debarkation experience sticks out - Delta Airlines' self-service kiosks in Tampa. In Grand Rapids, we interacted with humans to acquire our tickets. In Tampa, you had to use an ATM-like kiosk. Humans only moved your bag onto the conveyor belt when you were done. They did not help you get your tickets.

This was a very confusing, frustrating, and stressful experience. There is nothing quite like knowing that there is NO ONE to help you in case you do not quite understand the system. Learning how to use a new ticketing system with dozens of other fellow travelers breathing down your neck is not fun.

It did not help that the machines refused to give us tickets. We were at the airport early and the machine said that we could only get our tickets at a certain time. According to our watches, that time had passed. According to the airport clocks, that time had passed. Only in wacky kiosk-land was it too early to grant us tickets. Was that because the machine was broken?

Were we on a terrorist watch list? Who knows? What other things could be going wrong in there? It was fun to speculate that it may dispense incorrect tickets.

It had four methods of finding our booked tickets. We tried three of them and only one worked. This was not good. The way the information was presented, it seemed that we would only be getting our tickets to Atlanta, not our complete set of tickets. What's that? You want to ask a question about that? Ha ha! There are no people here! Just machines!

The saddest part was an old lady in front of us in line. When confronted with the machines, she did not realize that that was the ONLY way she was going to get her tickets. I tried to tell her that she had to get her ticket from the kiosk. She gave up her place in line, saying "No, I need to find someone to give me my ticket." She was unable to comprehend that Delta did not have two methods of acquiring tickets - humans and machines. Ha ha! Sorry grandma! There is no one here but baggage handlers! Sink or swim with the machines!

Memo to Delta Airlines: traveling is stressful enough. I would have waited in any line just to get a human to give me my tickets. Forcing frazzled travelers to play around with machines that only half-work is not going to win you any customers.

2.3 Cost

The cost for a particular ship cabin is published in Carnival's glossy brochures. This cost will probably include airfare as well. So far, it is pretty easy to plan your cruise spending. However, there plenty of "gotcha!" costs you will encounter on your cruise. If you are aware of them ahead of time, you can plan accordingly.

2.3.1 Shore Excursions

The number one item you are probably going to forget to budget for is shore excursions. They are not free. Unless you really like being cooped up in a huge floating building or you only plan to go shopping at each and every port, you are going to want to book some shore excursions. Most shore excursions start at \$50 per person. Buying shore excursions for two people at four ports adds up very quickly. On top of that, good shore excursions are going to cost more.

Carnival publishes the shore excursions available at each port on their website. It also publishes the approximate dollar amounts each will cost. When you purchase your cruise and get a booking number, you will be able to see exact prices on their website and order them early.

Note, however, that online shore excursion booking is closed the week before the cruise. Virtually all of the excursions have limited capacity, so to guarantee a spot, you must book early. Patty and I booked them on the first few hours of the cruise and had no problems, but we probably should have booked them sooner.

These shore excursions will be a big part of your cruise budget. They will dictate what fun things you will do over the course of your cruise and will affect your overall satisfaction with the cruise. Plan what you want to do with these early!

2.3.2 Gratuities

The minute you step foot on the boat, you will be slapped with gratuities. Actually, you'll be hit with them earlier, since you are supposed to tip the porters who carry your bags on the boat. Carnival charges \$10 per person, per day in pre-paid gratuities. This covers most of the wait staff you will encounter throughout your trip. Two people. Seven days. You do the math. Supposedly you can adjust the amount of the pre-paid gratuity if you like, but we found the process confusing, so we did not.

Then there are the drinks. Food is free on the ship. Most drinks are not. Further, each drink purchased has a 15% gratuity attached to it. This blow is softened a bit considering sales tax does not exist at sea. But it is something to keep in mind if you plan to drown your brain cells in alcohol every night. Soft drinks cost about \$1.50 per can or \$2.50 per 20 oz. Most alcoholic drinks cost \$4-\$6 each.

You can purchase a card that gives you unlimited soft drinks for the duration of the trip if you like. Patty and I did not need the card, since we discovered early on that water, coffee, and juice (e.g. fruit punch) were free.

Did I mention there are people to tip everywhere? You are required to give your bags to the porters when getting on the ship - and you are supposed to tip them \$1 per bag. It is polite to tip your tour guides and shore excursion bus drivers. Each shore excursion will have two to five people to tip. They ask that you tip your Matre'D too.

It is a very good idea to take out a stack of \$1 bills before leaving on your

trip so they can be parceled out for tips and small purchases. You do not want to ask your bus driver if he can break a twenty.

2.3.3 Cost Breakdown

To get an idea of trip expenses, Figure 1 illustrates our cruise costs. Exact dollar amounts are not given since the figure is meant to give an idea of the relative amounts. Actual prices will vary over time and will also depend on your choices (e.g. stateroom, excursions, etc).

It is clear that the cost of the cruise is dominated by three major costs:

- Air fare
- Cruise stateroom
- Shore excursions

Considering only the cost of your stateroom is not enough when attempting to get a full picture of your cruise costs. Plan accordingly!

2.4 Customs

Imagine the pirates of the Caribbean. At each port they would spend their hard-earned stolen money on booze, gambling, and maybe a knickknack or two at the local Tavern's gift shop. Times have changed since the pirate's time. Now we use credit cards for the booze, gambling and knickknacks.

More importantly, all the stuff you buy has to pass through customs at the end of your whirlwind adventure. Carnival is not very quick to mention (until the last day, of course) that there are limits to the whole "duty-free" thing. Specifically, if you spend more than \$800 on take-home stuff, you may get taxed. Further, you are only allowed two bottles of alcohol (per person? This was not too clear) before being taxed. Do not throw away the receipts!

If you plan on spending a lot of money, it would be wise of you to review tax and duty rules before you go. You might get a nasty surprise at customs at the end of your trip. Then you will have one more thing in common with the pirates of the Caribbean - you will both say "Aarr!"

Ha ha. I crack me up.

Cruise Costs

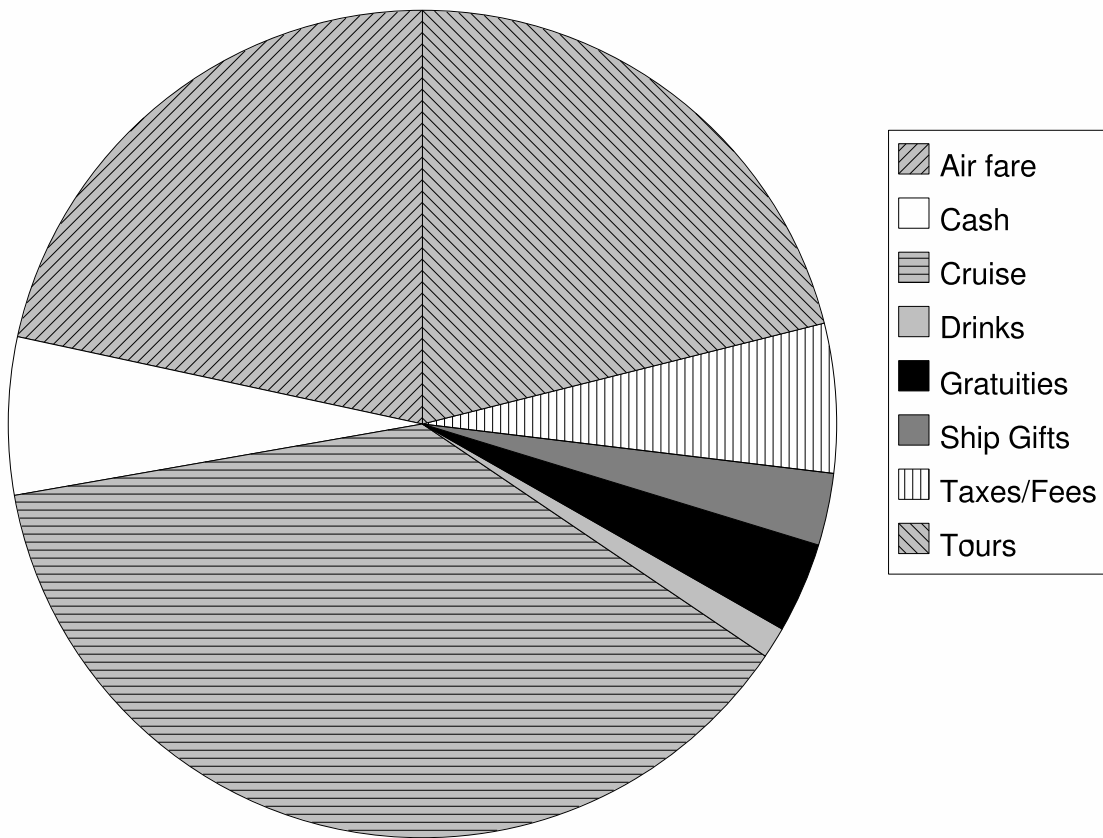


Figure 1: Cost breakdown of cruise

3 The Cruise

You could say the time you spend on the boat is the "meat and potatoes" of the trip. That is a pretty stupid expression, but you could say it. It would probably be a better idea to say that you will be spending a lot of time on the boat, so a lot is riding on how much fun it is to be sailing around the Caribbean on a floating city. The good news is that Carnival calls them the "Fun Ships" for a reason.

3.1 Food

Virtually all food is free on the cruise. The only food that you have to pay for are cakes and other candies available for purchase at one of the coffee shops. You can also pay extra (\$30 per person) for especially fancy food at one of the restaurants on the boat. Otherwise, if it is not already on the plate of a fellow traveler, you can grab whatever you want and chow down.

The selection and availability of food is great. Formal dinners and breakfasts are available in the main dining room. There always a buffet available at some time during normal waking hours. Room service (sandwiches, breakfast food, etc) is 24/7. Failing all that, there is also a 24-hour pizzeria.

3.1.1 Formal Dinners

The formal, seated dinners on board were great. Our waiter and assistant waiter were very friendly and went out of their way to please us. Here is a fun tip - just because there is a list of appetizers and entrees does not mean you have to choose just one from the lists. You can order as many appetizers and entrees as you want. You paid for it all up front, so if you want to try the both the eggrolls and smoked salmon appetizers for your dinner, go for it!

Since all of the food is already paid for and there is such a variety of food, this is a great time to try out new things. Some of the foods I had never had before the cruise included:

- Escargot - it was kind of like bland calamari. I think escargot is just an excuse to pour butter all over something.
- Caviar - they were tiny, salty, and fishy. It was ok, but tell me again why rich people pay buckets of money for it?

- Red Snapper - The only thing I knew about this fish beforehand was that it was the top choice on Weird Al's "Wheel of Fish." Unlike the woman in the movie, I did not trade it for what was in the box. Good thing too - it was very good.
- Salmon in a variety of forms. I love Salmon, so it was all good.
- Quail - it looked like a tiny chicken. It was full of tiny goodness.
- Beef in various fancy forms (e.g. filet mignon, etc.)

Note that the formal dinners take place at large tables. Unless you have brought some friends, it is likely that you will be seated next to other travelers you do not know. This is not necessarily bad, since it gives you people to talk to on your cruise. This is a problem when you are randomly stuck with people with bad personalities. You do not want to miss the food at the formal dinner, but you may be stuck with people you could do without.

In our case, we sat with one person whose hobby seemed to be the sadistic belittling of everyone around him. Patty and I stuck it out. We probably could have asked the Matre'D for new seating arrangements. Or we could have ate at the buffet every night. Or we could have eaten at "Nick and Nora's" (the restaurant on board you pay extra for). If you do not have the same patience as us, you could try one of these alternatives.

3.1.2 Food Warnings

If you are at all concerned about your weight, you may not want to go on a cruise. If you have some self-control, you will only become visibly fatter after the cruise (think the college "freshman 15"). If you have no self-control, you will become an immobile blob of fat with hands. The cruise staff will have to roll you out of the boat at the end of your trip like that blueberry girl from "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory."

"That's silly, John", you are saying, "I've read there is a gym available on the boat. I'll get up at 7:00am every day and work off the calories I've eaten." Sure you will. Make sure to bring sweatpants for your exercising - they expand with your waistline!

One more thing about the food - there are vegetarian alternatives on board, but like most restaurants, the vast majority of the food will be served with meat. You may want to keep this in mind if you are a traveling vegetarian. As always, the buffets are your friend.

3.2 Entertainment

My hat goes off to our cruise director Carlo and one of his assistants: "Karl with a K." They were always up on stage, mingling with guests and making sure everyone was having a good time. They really made the entertainment on the ship memorable. I can only hope all of the ships have entertainment directors like these.

Our entertainment director usually told us of the big events going on day to day. We were also given a newsletter each night that told us where all the fun was. There were some communication problems, but the events were typically where they said they would be and on time.

3.2.1 Main Shows

The ship comes with its own orchestra. You get to hear them every night during the main shows. Its easy to get spoiled on a big band playing in an auditorium for free every night. The "Captain's Cocktail Party" was particularly good, since they dimmed the lights, passed out drinks, and the whole place had the ambiance of a classy jazz nightclub.

As a sidenote, if you like alcohol, then you want to attend the Captain's Cocktail Party. As far as I could tell, it was any drink you could want for free, and as many as you want for free. Presumably, they want you to get a taste for it all so you will buy more throughout the week. This did not work in my case, since I tried a Manhattan - which should probably be called a "Manhattan Project" given the drink's similarity to atomic weapons.

Over the course of the trip, we saw two "Las Vegas" style shows, a juggler, two comedians, a singer, and a hypnotist. There were also multiple "Welcome Aboard" shows and little games. All of the shows ranged from "pretty good" to "great." The ship had high-energy big shows, and the dancers and singers were particularly good. I did not fail to be entertained every night.

All of the main shows were family shows. There was nothing too racy about them. In fact, I noticed the "Camp Carnival" kids were brought to the first Las Vegas style show. This meant that the comedians were constrained to family humor at the main shows. However, for those fans of George Carlin or Chris Rock out there, you could find the comedians performing "rated R" humor later in the evening.

I have only one complaint about the main shows: the auditorium. The auditorium's construction allows only a few people to get completely unob-

structed views. Showing up a half hour early for the main shows to acceptable seats is a must.

3.2.2 Games

If you like games, they were being held constantly throughout the day on the cruise. Patty and I skipped most of them because we were busy eating or going on shore excursions. The ones we did attend were fun. We learned how to do the opening dance from the "Austin Powers" movie from one of the dancers. We gave a demonstration of our new skill to some of our fellow cruisers. They also had "The Marriage Game" - which was their version of "The Newlywed Game." You can imagine the fun they had with that one. Sadly, only three couples were selected from the entire auditorium, so Patty and I did not get to play.

3.2.3 Spa Carnival

Carnival has a Spa you can pay extra for. The Spa runs promotions every week, so if there is a service you would like, you can try waiting and it will probably go on "sale" on a particular day. Even with the sales, their services are not cheap. They start at around \$100 and only go up.

Perhaps this is normal for Spas, but most of their services seem to be fruity New Age nonsense. "Detoxification", "Healing", and "Purity" were the buzzwords used over and over again. I would have ignored all of the nonsense terms if the Spa were not so expensive! Patty and I did not have time (or money!) to do anything with Spa Carnival.

3.2.4 Art Auction

The art auction was a big deal. In fact, there were several art auctions. They lure you in with free champagne, art raffles, and a free piece of art valued at \$95 (looks like a printout of a painting to me). The auction we attended lasted about three hours, which was a bit longer than we expected.

If you are looking to seriously buy a piece of art, this is the place to do it. However, I would recommend doing research first. They are quick with the terminology, artists names, how they reproduce works of art, etc. If you are not careful, you may a lot of money for a reproduction you thought was an original piece.

Prices start at \$95. Anything good is going to cost \$200 plus. If you like Thomas Kinkade, you are not alone. You can buy his work at this auction, but be prepared to bid. Everyone else wants to buy Thomas Kinkade too.

Patty and I saw some pieces we liked. I saw one I particularly liked by Linda Le Kniff. It was a picture of two lovers, probably just getting back from work, getting together. It was a nice image, and it reminded me of Patty and me. There was another that was a beautiful picture of a Japanese woman in a Kimono smelling a flower. But with \$500 price tags, we could not justify buying either them. How about we make that next car payment instead of buying a pretty picture to hang on our wall?

3.2.5 Gambling

The ship has its own casino and also holds Bingo at least once a day in the main auditorium. The casino only operates when the ship is at sea to avoid pesky local laws. The same is true for the gift shop.

There are plenty of machines and human dealers to play with. Patty and I even put in a couple bucks into a couple machines. I have never really understood gambling. Perhaps it is more fun with a human dealer playing cards. My experience with the mechanical gambling machines invariably goes something like this:

1. Put in money.
2. Press button.
3. Lose.
4. Try again.
5. Lose again.
6. Lose interest.

Obviously, there is something wrong with me, since there were plenty of other cruisers that were happy to sit in front of the machines all day slowly dumping in the contents of a bucket of cash. I must not be cool like them. Perhaps I should take up smoking too.

3.3 Ship Decor

So, what does the inside of the ship look like? On my first day, I called it an "adult's playground." I think that is still an apt description. Elegant and refined it is not. For the main areas, think "Las Vegas" and "gaudy."

This is not necessarily a bad thing, it depends on your point of view. I thought the bright colors, shiny objects, statues, paintings and fountains were neat and stimulating. Others, I am sure, will think that the whole ship is rather tacky. Fair enough - if you do not like this sort of thing, you probably want to go on another cruise.

3.4 Stateroom

Our stateroom was perfectly fine. It was much like any other hotel room in the world. It came with a couch, a table, two beds that were put together to make one big bed, a TV, a safe that was locked and unlocked with your credit card, large closets, and a private bar. We never looked at the private bar.

If you can afford it, a room with a balcony is a wonderful thing. We could not afford it, but we got one anyway because not enough people were riding on the ship. The balcony comes with two chairs and a small table. If you like relaxing with some good company, a drink, and view, there is nothing quite like looking at the sea from your balcony window.

Our stateroom was a wonderful home base. There were many days where we came back from a long shore excursion and were too tired to do anything else for a while. So, we watched some TV. We got cable television on the cruise, along with videotapes of events that had already happened on the cruise (this was more entertaining and useful than you might think). We also had a free movie channel, and we watched "I, Robot" more than once while we were relaxing or getting ready to do something else. You can purchase movies to view on demand too, but we did not.

Our stateroom was managed by a steward, but we never saw him. This was not his fault, we just did not have a need to contact him, so we did not. Who needs to call a steward when your room is cleaned twice a day? They clean it in the morning like any normal hotel, but then they clean it again when you are out to dinner. The second time, they leave behind mints, towels, a newsletter with the next day's events and little animals made from folded towels. You have to see these little guys to believe it.

3.5 Gifts

If you want to buy jewelry, perfume, watches, or liquor cheaply, the cruise gift shops are the place to be. No sales tax. Prices are lower than on the mainland. Its a great place to be if you like shopping.

Aside from the liquor and high-priced goods, they also had an assortment of crystal, T-shirts, clothing accessories (purses, scarves, etc.), and food. Patty is the expert on shopping, and she noted that the prices on the boat were very good. She purchased a nice purse for \$10 that would go for \$30 on the mainland. And there is no sales tax! Score!

There is one thing to watch out for concerning the alcohol. You can purchase as much alcohol as you like, but you do not get to have your alcohol until the last day of the cruise. They box it up and keep it in a storehouse until then. So, if you were planning to have a drunken frat party and binge drink straight from the bottle, you are going to have to do that when you get off the boat.

4 The Excursions

Shore excursions are the fun things you can do at each port your ship visits. You might wonder about the safety of the excursions. After all, most of the stops are in countries a tad poorer than the United States. Is the water safe? Will you be kidnapped by desperados and held for ransom? Should you learn Kung Fu before you go?

The good news is that any excursion arranged through Carnival is going to be safe. They will get you back to the boat on time, they will give you safe food and water, and they will keep you on the beaten path.

You do not have to purchase shore excursions to go on adventures. If you want to live on the edge, save some money, or whatever, you can waltz right off the boat and do whatever you like. Just keep in mind that arranging your own excursions is at your own risk. If you do this, I wish you luck. Don't forget to take some pictures of the boat as it sails away without you!

Patty and I went on an excursion at every port we stopped at. That included the Grand Cayman island (Britain), Costa Maya (Mexico), Cozumel (Mexico), and Belize City (Belize).

4.1 Grand Cayman

Our first stop was the Grand Cayman island. Aside from its scenery, Grand Cayman is famous for its many banks. If you are a large, evil corporation and you need to do some "discreet" banking, Grand Cayman is the place to be! We learned throughout the course of our tours that Grand Cayman also has a large number of churches for its population. If I remember correctly, they have 300,000 people, 500+ banks, and 752 churches. Banks and churches? It's the Grand Rapids of the Caribbean!

The port was busy. There were lots of tourists from the boat and lots of people trying to sell tours to the tourists from the boat. The port was right on a busy road in the middle of a busy commercial district. Almost every tour went to the same basic stops, so it was not obvious to us at first which tour was ours. Each tour had a sign, and most said "Turtle farm", "Stingray city", etc. Thankfully, we were able to muddle through the confusion of our first stop and get on the right bus.

4.1.1 Island Tour

Our tour guide was very friendly and had lots to say about the island. Unfortunately, it quickly became obvious that something had happened to the island. Most of the trees were overturned and brush and bramble were scattered and piled in large fields. Many of the buildings were damaged. The most expensive houses and apartments looked fine, but many of the native houses looked like they were in rough shape. Roofs were missing and doors, windows, and walls were being repaired.

Our tour guide confirmed that hurricane Ivan had ravaged the island one year earlier and that they were still recovering. He said that it was one of the two worst hurricanes to hit the island in history. Damage was extensive, and many still lived in temporary trailer homes. Interestingly enough, trailer homes were outlawed before the hurricane, but were brought in for the emergency. Once recovery is complete, the trailers will be moved back off the island.

Despite the damage, only three people had died. The islanders had well-established procedures for surviving hurricanes. One of the casualties of the hurricane did not follow the procedures, and died as a result. I believe the other two died due to medical conditions - not as a direct result of the hurricane.

Our tour guide pointed out the local Burger King, which was up and running only three days after the hurricane to provide food and drink to the people on the island. The local Coca-Cola bottling plant also recovered quickly and provided bottled water to the residents of the island. Our guide said everyone on the island was very grateful.

Other points of interest were the condos owned by Bill Gates (and other assorted rich people) and the Governor's mansion. If you are insanely rich, there are condos and apartments available right on the beachfront.

4.1.2 Hell

Our first stop was "Hell." Hell is an interesting rock formation about the size of a small parking lot that looks like...hell. It is a collection of gray rocks composed of bits of sand, coral, shell, and other materials.

The gift shop, of course, played up on the name. Think of any funny phrase involving going to hell. Now imagine that funny phrase plastered on T-shirts, bumper stickers, and postcards. The owner of the store even had a goatee and fake horns.

The whole experience reminded me a little bit of Metropolis, IL. The town is named Metropolis. It has a big statue of Superman. It has lots of gift shops. That was about all there was to the town. This was such a big deal because...why?

Thankfully, this was the most gimmicky tourist stop of our entire trip. It got better after this.

4.1.3 Turtle Farm

The turtle farm was an interesting place. I do not know if it was purely a business venture or if it was funded by the government. Perhaps it was both? The turtles were raised on this farm for one thing: being eaten by people. Some were released into the wild - on what criteria I do not recall. The rest were eaten.

Do not be outraged yet. The idea behind the turtle farm is to raise turtles for those who want to eat them and leave the wild ones alone. It is an effort in conservation. That is why I was not sure if this was a business, a government-sponsored program, or both.

Anyway, the turtles are kept in huge circular tanks that look like big wading pools. And by "kept", I mean "crammed." There were many, many

sea turtles in each tank. Sea turtles are not small either. Think of, say, a lawnmower. Now think of a lawnmower with a shell and fins. That is a really weird image - but it is about the same size as one sea turtle.

Looking at the tanks, all I could think of are the lobster tanks you see at big grocery stores like Meijer. In those, there are lots of lobsters and nothing else. The same was true for these tanks. It was a big pile of sea turtles milling about in a big tank and nothing else. Unlike the lobsters, the turtles are constantly moving since they like to swim and they have to come up for air every so often.

The turtles were cool to look at and listen to. They make a distinctive noise when they come up for air. Similar, perhaps, to the sound of a scuba diver taking in a breath? It is hard to draw an analogy.

The turtle farm also had a small zoo of other animals, it included an iguana and some other animals I do not remember. The zoo was not very interesting. What was interesting were the baby turtle tanks. Tourists were allowed to reach in and grab a baby turtle. It was like picking up a big squirming rock. The baby turtles did not like being picked up very much but, oddly enough, they calmed down quickly when you patted them on their heads.

4.1.4 Stingray City

Stingray city is a sandbar apparently in the middle of nowhere. It took about a half hour boat ride to get there, and when we arrived, there were many boats and many people already there. Looking into the water, there was nothing but sand and stingrays. Watching them from above the water was amazing. You could see these large gray shapes speeding through the water, heading towards the tourists. When the stingrays were swimming towards the sandbars, I would estimate they were swimming as fast as a bicyclist traveling quickly.

According to our tour guides, the largest stingrays can reach a diameter of six feet across! The stinger on the stingrays is a defensive measure against sharks. The stinger must be "activated" before it will do any harm. Our guides said that stingrays will not activate it against us, since they love people! We are their meal ticket. We give them free squid in return for them socializing with us. The only thing you do not want to do is rub the scent of food on yourself. Supposedly, the stingrays have about 4 horsepower of suction when they gulp up their food. They are also pretty dumb. If they

smell food, they will attempt to suck in parts of your body. This results in a "Stingray Hickey" - which supposedly can last up to a month!

We were given a snorkel and a little dead squid. The water was not deep, and we had no trouble walking around. As soon as we were in the water, it did not take long for the stingrays to head over to our group. One of our tour guides grabbed a passing stingray and held on to it. We could help hold it if we wanted, and Patty did. They glide so gracefully in the water. You may not guess they are so heavy - I believe they can be around 140 pounds.

We also got a "Stingray Backrub." You see, the underside of the stingray is very soft and pleasant to touch. The best analogy we have found so far is that it is very similar to the inside of your cheek. Its not slimy and gross, but soft and nice. So, the stingray backrub was a cute way to get up close and personal with them. The tour guide who grabbed the stingray rubbed it across the backs of both Patty and me at the same time. It was a unique experience.

After that, we attempted to feed a stingray. At first, none of the stingrays were approaching us for our little squid. I gave up and stood up for a while, and was surprised when a stingray came right at me, partially lifted itself out of the water to about my chest level, and sucked my little squid right out of my hand! Shy it was not. It made a distinctive sucking sound that was audible even though the stingray was still underwater.

After the squid was gone, we just watched them under the water. They were very graceful. At times it looked like they were flying - flapping their "wings" underwater. When they were moving more slowly, they rippled their bodies to move forward. They were really fascinating.

However, some did not think they were so great. There were a couple women who were freaking out about the stingrays. The stingrays are not shy and they will brush up against you when they are passing by. Some could not handle that part. It is mean, but I thought this was funny. It reminded me of the women in the old cartoons that would stand up on a chair and scream, shout and pull up their skirts whenever a cartoon mouse entered the kitchen. As our tour guides said, the stingrays were not going to hurt anybody, so what was all the fuss about?

Anyway, to sum up, if you go to Grand Cayman and do not pay a visit to Stingray City, you are doing yourself a great disservice. There really is nothing else like it.

4.2 Costa Maya

Costa Maya had the "least" amount to do of all the stops. That is, it had the smallest selection of shore excursions of all the ports. This does not mean it was a boring place. Most of the excursions involved enjoying the beauty of the surrounding area. There was kayaking, snorkeling, horseback riding, and dune buggy driving. We chose kayaking, and it was a wonderful experience.

4.2.1 Clear Kayaking

Our main shore excursion at Costa Maya was the clear-boat kayaking. The kayak was clear plastic, and the idea is that you can kayak over coral reefs and see them right through your boat. Unfortunately, the sea was too rough to go over the main reef, so we could only go around the outskirts. The kayaking was fun anyway, since the water was beautiful, the coral was interesting, and it was nice to get some exercise after becoming bloated over three days of constant eating.

Before we even got in the water, we saw something I thought was fascinating. It was thousands of little jellyfish. They were brown and partially translucent. They were about the diameter of a nickel and about the length of a push-pin. I had never seen a jellyfish before, and these were (apparently) not poisonous. They were not much to look at out of the water - they could not move and were just a pile of goo. In the water, they followed the current and shook a little to move themselves around. I noticed that many had washed ashore, dried out, and died. I thought they were very cool.

4.2.2 Fishing Village

When we returned from our kayaking, we stopped in the local fishing village. This village was not a tourist trap yet. The roads were all dirt roads and the speed bumps were ship rope! The village had a one-room elementary school house. The students there wore uniforms remarkably similar to those worn by Catholic school students in the U.S. The local church looked like a little re-purposed warehouse.

We were served lunch: tacos made from chicken and locally-caught lobster! They were delicious - and served with homemade tortilla chips. To top it off, we were given some of the local Mexican beer. This was the first beer I have ever drank and I have to say it was pretty good! It was not nearly as bad as I expected beer to be.

While we were eating, some of the locals came out to sell us things. One man had an iguana riding on his head, and you could take your picture with it for \$4. It was pretty silly - which is just the kind of photo-op I like. I am now the proud owner of a picture of me with an iguana on my head.

Another woman came by with her daughter and sold handbags, bracelets, scarves, and other cloth products. She could not speak any English - except for prices. Patty bought a very nice handmade purse from her for \$5.

Another woman came up to us and sold us a bag of banana chips. As you would expect, they were thin dried banana slices. They only cost \$1, but we realized after the fact that we were in Mexico - and that we would not be eating the local food without risk. We decided it would probably be best to skip eating the banana chips. They were probably safe, but we certainly did not want to risk being sick the rest of the trip!

Yet another woman had a table set up. She sold rosaries, crucifixes carved from fish bone, and other handicrafts. We bought a polished conch shell from her. The shell was big and was a rosy, sandy color on the polished side.

Conch shells, by the way, were everywhere. They were along or in the many dirt paths in the village. They were not as pretty as the shells for sale, since they were dirty and unpolished. But if you like shells, this was the place to be.

I also noticed that cacti were growing wild everywhere. Some of the cacti were about eight feet tall! For a native of Michigan, I thought this was pretty neat.

To top all of this off, our tour guides (who were the friendliest people you will ever meet) actually climbed some of the palm trees and cut off some of the coconuts for us to eat! They used a machete to cut them open and we were able to drink the milk and eat the meat. Coconut fun fact: the "meat" (white stuff) on the coconut is very bland by itself. You are supposed to eat the brown skin on top of the meat to get the coconut flavor. When you do this, the coconut is delicious. The milk was sweet and creamy.

To summarize, the clear water kayaking was fun, but exploring the fishing village and having fun with our tour guides was even more fun than that! It was an unexpected, but wonderful surprise!

4.2.3 Shopping at Port

Costa Maya has a very large shopping center at port. There are shops in buildings you would find in any American strip mall, and there were also

shops in grass huts constructed in the main plaza. The sales tactics here were very different from what you would find in America. The salesmen in the grass huts were extremely aggressive. The salesmen in the buildings were less aggressive, but in each case the salesmen would follow you around their stores, talk to you, and name prices for anything you were interested in.

An important fact: for all of the goods in the port, the quoted price is not actually what you pay for it. All of the prices in all of the stores are negotiable. If you buy in bulk, they will give you a deal. If you attempt to walk away, they will lower the price of anything you were interested in. I believe that in attempting to walk away from one of the more annoying salesmen, he lowered the price of some candleholders we showed interest in to about one-fourth of the sticker price. The men in the grass huts will do anything to keep you in their store and buying their stuff. If you do not like aggressive salespeople, then I recommend you stay away from the grass huts.

The plaza also had a saltwater pool to swim in and an outdoor theater some dancers were performing on. The shows definitely had a tourist trap feel to them. We did not linger there for too long.

4.3 Cozumel

Cozumel is an island off mainland Mexico. If I remember correctly, it is Mexico's largest island. We did not see much of Cozumel, since we immediately got on another boat to go to the mainland, where Xcarat is. The boat ride took about a half hour, and we rode a bus for about a half hour after arriving at port.

4.3.1 Xcarat

Xcarat is a kind of a zoo. But the animals are not kept in cages. All of the animals were kept out in the open air, usually with a moat or a small fence keeping them in their pens.

We saw some pretty exotic animals. A spider monkey came right up to us and sat on a rock probably not six feet way from the path we were on. Less exotic was some variety of deer that was kept in some of the pens. We saw a tapir - which most of the tourists mistook for an anteater. It seems as if anything with a long nose is mistaken for an anteater by tourists. Sometimes I wonder why elephants are not mistaken for anteaters more often. We saw a jaguar and lionesses from a safe distance away. They also had an aquarium

with sea turtles, all manner of fish, stingrays, and a crocodile. I got to see a flounder up close. Its two little eyes poked out of the sand like little periscopes.

In the middle of our tour of Xcarat, we took a river swim. We gave our stuff to the park employees, they gave us life jackets, and we got into a small saltwater river. The river was too deep to touch bottom, and it had a current that would take you along for a ride. This river went underground into caves, and you could see fossils of shells and coral in this cave. If you looked closely, you would also see there were small fish in the water with you.

This river ride took about 45 minutes. It was fun way to cool off after a hot day of traveling and exploring. It was also a nice way to burn a few hundred of the tens of thousands of calories we had been consuming during the trip.

One thing that was unfortunate about Xcarat was that our tour was rigid. Xcarat is really like an ecological theme park, and there is lots to see and do. But we had a schedule to keep and a boat to get on, so we did not get to see everything or take our time as much as I would have liked. One thing I was particularly sad to miss was the manatee pen. I had never seen them before, and I was not going to see them on this trip.

Aside from the animals, Xcarat had many beautiful sites to just hang out at. There were lots of coves for swimming, lots of clear inner tubes for goofing off in the water, lots of chairs and umbrellas, and lots of hammocks spread across palm trees. It was a picture-perfect Caribbean site.

4.3.2 Dolphin Swim

Xcarat the park was fun, but the main attraction for us was the dolphin swim. We were given a life jacket and went into a semi-natural cove. There they had three or four dolphins swimming around. They were trained and did some little tricks for us first. They "spoke", splashed us with some water, and gave us a kiss (with the park's cameraman taking a picture of that for \$15).

Some were swimming around while this was going on, and it was amazing to me how fast they were. They could turn on a dime in the water going at what seemed like amazing speeds. Its a contrast to see a dolphin zooming around the water like a sports car and seeing humans floundering their way through the water on the surface - going at about a snail's pace.

After the little staged show, we swam to a deeper part of the pool and

hung out while the dolphins swam around us. We were allowed to pet them if they let us. They signified they were ok with touching by coming up to the surface and swimming by us. If they were underneath the water, they did not want to be bothered.

We had to be careful, since our fingernails could damage the dolphins' skin. Their skin was not soft. It was tough, but not unpleasant, and had a fine texture to it. It felt like a diver's wetsuit.

Some of them seemed particularly interested in Patty, and would sit in the water in front of her for a while - just looking at her. They even rolled on their backs for her, so she could pet their stomachs.

We stayed in the water for what seemed like a long time, while the dolphins swam around us. It was a fun and unique experience. It was superficially similar to swimming with stingrays, but dolphins were not the same as the stingrays. They had a power and intelligence to them that the stingrays lacked.

4.4 Belize

Belize is a small country on the southern border of Mexico. It is bordered on the south and west by Guatemala. The east side of Belize is the coast. Our tour guide said that Belize had recently declared independence (in the 1980s). They speak English in Belize, but mostly they speak Creole - a dialect of English created by slaves that wanted to communicate without their masters understanding what they were saying.

4.4.1 Driving to Xunantunich

It was a long drive to Xunantunich. It took somewhere between one and two hours to arrive at the Xunantunich site. The trip was over sixty miles, and we traversed almost the entire width of Belize. Guatemala was only about twenty miles away from Xunantunich.

The ride there was not boring, since our tour guides talked about their country, its history, and Mayan history. Belize, unfortunately, needs some work. Our guides attempted to put a good face on it, but poverty seems widespread in Belize. There were no people dying in the streets, but the many of the houses we saw were shacks, and trash was piled in many places - usually right next to the shacks.

Most of the poorer-looking buildings were on stilts. Even far inland, the scattered houses were all on stilts. Belize was experiencing a drought when we visited, so it seemed strange to us. Did water really come that far inland? Perhaps it does, since we hear a hurricane hit Belize only a couple weeks after we left.

Most people worked in the city (Belize City) but lived in the country. Most people were too poor to own a car, so there was an extensive bus system in place. Every few miles, it seemed, there was another bus stop shelter with people waiting in it. Our tour guide said that commutes are long in Belize. Some take up to two hours.

The countryside looked barren. There were lots of shrubs and plants, but no farms in sight. The only agriculture that we saw was a couple orchards growing fruits. Houses (shacks) dotted the landscape - but much seemed untamed. Mountains could be seen far in the distance.

Our tour guide said some things I took with a grain of salt. For instance, he said that about 12% of the population is unemployed, but they choose not to work. He said there are plenty of jobs in Belize, and they had to import labor from outside the country to fill all of them. He was also quite convinced that black men were known to the Mayan civilization. He presented as proof a photocopy of a Mayan decoration which depicted a face with "clearly Negro features." He discussed how mainstream scientists were unwilling to accept this theory. That was my cue to smile and nod.

4.4.2 Xunantunich

Xunantunich is a Mayan ruin abandoned thousands of years ago. It is in the middle of jungle, and to get to it, you have to cross a river via a hand-cranked ferry. The site had a small museum, and they explained many details of Mayan history along with guesses as to the particular history of Xunantunich.

The relics themselves were magnificent. The main pyramid (ziggaraut?) was dozens of stories tall and looked (rightfully so) like a man-made mountain. Most memorable was our climb to the top of this pyramid. We had to climb the huge original stairs, when sometimes it was easier to crawl on all fours than take the big steps up. We then had to climb stairs that were placed by later explorers. These were easier to traverse, but nerve-racking because you were very, very high up with nothing separating you from a fall of several stories. At the top, you could survey what was once an entire city, and see for dozens of miles in every direction. Indeed, our tour guide noted

that we were looking at Guatemala about twenty miles in the distance in one direction.

Sometimes the local plants were just as interesting as the buildings. We were surrounded by a forest of huge tropical trees. Their leaves were tens of feet long and the trunks stretched up several stories. On some of the tree branches were dozens of insect nests. We learned later that these were tree ant nests. Occasionally there were also huge termite nests.

4.4.3 Shopping at Xunantunich

Thankfully, we had about ten minutes to shop for goods from the locals when we left. Like in Costa Maya, these people offered for sale a collection of cheap, unique handmade goods. Many of the things available for purchase were woodcrafts - which seems to be Belize's specialty in tourist goods. I presume it is from cutting down their plentiful rain forests. Most other goods were cloth products.

We purchased a "secret box" - which is like a jewelry box, but has a puzzle-box method of opening it. We also bought a small "worry doll" - which was a small cute doll (it looked like a handmade finger-puppet) that, according to Mayan legend, will take away your worries at night if you place it underneath your pillow.

4.4.4 Lunch

We had lunch at a local hotel (some distance away from the Mayan ruins). We were served rice with beans made with coconut milk. Along with the rice, we had some Plantenas. They were some special variety of banana(?). I did not care for them much, but Patty thought they were ok. They also gave us some good Papaya juice. Along with the great food, we also had live music played for us on an instrument that sounded much like a xylophone.

We also met the hotel's pet macaw. Our guides recommended we did not get too close. The bird's wings were clipped, and I think it was bitter. So it enjoyed spreading the misery around by snapping at anybody that passed too close by. Since macaw beaks are very strong, we took our tour guides' word for it.

It was a nice time to have a rest and talk with our fellow travelers. At this stop, we talked to one of many fellow guests that claimed to own his own business. Maybe this was true. But then, my experience has been that

people that go out of their way to tell you they own their own business often do not, and are just trying to impress you.

4.4.5 Driving back to Port

Driving away from Xunantunich was not quite as exciting since the tour guides no longer talked. After a long day of walking in the hot sun, most people slept.

What made the day memorable, however, were the fires. Our tour guide had said earlier that fires spontaneously erupt in Belize and that they were nothing to worry about. He said that dry conditions, maybe bits of glass, maybe human actions, maybe other contributing factors led to fires springing up. It even helps some of the local trees, which rely on fires to open up their seeds.

We saw this up close on our drive back. We could see a few columns of smoke in the distance throughout the trip back, but one of the fires was right next to the road. In fact, it was on both sides of the road! We briefly drove through a thick cloud of black smoke and had large fires on each side of us. Our tour guides were nonchalant. It was all a bit surreal.

We passed through the smoke and fire without incident, but it was a bizarre experience nonetheless.

4.4.6 Last Note

Of all the stops, Belize sticks out. It was the one place that seemed truly foreign. The one place that was very different from all the others. From the third-world atmosphere of the cities and countryside we visited, to the ruins in the middle of jungle - this was not the plastic McDonalds world we came from, nor was it a replica of it.

5 Cruise Comments

Now it is time for the good stuff. What do Patty and I recommend for your cruise? Do we have any tips to share? Did we think Carnival did a good job? Well, we will tell you!

5.1 Traveler Tips

First, we present the traveler tips. We learned many things about cruises while we were cruising. We wished we knew many of them before we went. We thought it would be helpful to share the tips and tricks we accumulated on our cruise.

5.1.1 Traveling

Make your luggage distinctive. Use colored duct tape. Buy unusual luggage. Get cool, colored luggage tags. Do anything to make your luggage easy to spot.

This is standard advice for traveling through airports, but it is even more important for getting off of the ship. When you get off the ship you will be shown to a gigantic warehouse, where there will be thousands of identical bags. There will also be hundreds of other people attempting to find their generic black bag among the thousands in the warehouse. Make your bag unique and save yourself some stress while you are traveling.

5.1.2 Stateroom

We signed up for the cheapest stateroom we could get. This was an "interior" stateroom, which meant we signed up for a small room with no windows. What we got was a room with a balcony and an "obstructed view" (a lifeboat was blocking some of our view). This was a significant upgrade in terms of cost. Traveling in the off-season and buying a cheap stateroom may be a bet that pays off. It did in our case.

5.1.3 Having fun

The cruise is a great time to try new things. There will be new food, drinks, and activities everywhere. Getting involved with the people and activities is a great way to make sure you have fun. There are lots of people to make brief friendships with, and there are lots of fun activities that require you to get up and take part in. You have paid for it, you'll never see any of these people ever again, so go for it!

Speaking of people, it may be a good idea to travel with another couple or group of people. It is a good thing to share you fun times with others

that you know. Getting to know strangers is fine, but I am guessing most will prefer to share the fun with their friends or family.

You may be fretting about having to wear a swimsuit on the cruise. You may be saying "Oh - I could never wear a swimsuit. I'm so fat / old / big / small / hideously deformed." I can tell you this with confidence: don't worry about it. There will be many people on this cruise. Many of them will be fatter than you. Many of them will be uglier than you. Many of them will be older than you. Most of them will be in a bathing suit at one time or another. No one is going to care about little 'ol you. Besides, failing to bring along a bathing suit will severely limit the activities you can participate in. So bring your bathing suit and celebrate the wonder of the human body with a bunch of hairy guys from Wisconsin!

5.1.4 Excursions

Bring sunscreen. Any body part that we missed was burned. I was very impressed when I managed to burn my shins on one of our shore excursions (it was because I was sitting in the kayak with shorts on). I have never burned any part of my legs in my life. I did on this trip.

Tanning before the trip is a good idea. It will prepare you for the Caribbean sun. For sunscreen, you want SPF 45, waterproof, and oil-free. Some might miss the oil-free part, but you may be in a situation where the tours do not want you wearing oily sunscreen for fear of harming the aquatic animals.

Of course, with SPF 45, Patty and I did not tan much. That was fine by us. If you really want to tan, you can do it on the ship deck. We were not interested in risking the pain and suffering of a burn.

Bring lots of plastic water bottles. You can fill them up on the ship, and you will guzzle them on every shore excursion. Patty and I typically went through three or four bottles each day on shore. Most people did not seem to have any. Maybe they got along fine, but there is no reason to be dying of thirst on your vacation!

Patty and I both purchased new walking shoes before the trip. Our old ones were getting worn out, and this was a good excuse for new ones. This turned out to be a very good idea, since there was lots of walking - sometimes over rough terrain. Bring good walking shoes.

Give yourself plenty of time. Getting on and off the boat is an involved process. It often included getting on smaller boats to get to the pier. There

will be lines, and it will take a while to get from point A to point B.

5.1.5 Supplies

We brought a briefcase to store all of our travel documents and money for the first and last days of the trip. We were glad we did. You seem to endlessly show people documents along the way, and having them in a handy, closeable place made all the checks run smoothly. Scrounging for documents in your bags (or losing them!) is not fun.

We did not use the bug spray we brought. We had previously read many recommendations to bring bug spray. Maybe bugs were out of season. You may as well bring it, just in case.

Bringing a power strip is (surprisingly) a good idea. We did not bring one for luggage space reasons. All you really get in your stateroom is one outlet. That is fine if all you need is a clock (which is also not included), but if you are a member of the womanly gender, you are probably going to need to use the hair dryer, at least.

5.1.6 Gifts

Carnival will pass out maps of "recommended" shops at the ports you visit. These are nice, but keep in mind the "recommended" shops pay a fee to Carnival to be listed. To be fair, Carnival also guarantees these shops live up to certain standards and money-back guarantees.

Most of the official shops in port get boring after a while. It is an endless parade of "duty-free" shops that sell alcohol, jewelry, watches, and perfume. If you really want to buy liquor, cigarettes, perfumes, etc. you can do all of that "duty-free" shopping on the boat. The prices are all reasonable, and there is no sales tax.

Instead of looking at the same crap at every duty free shop in every port, try looking around for natives near the tourist areas. The best gifts are the ones you buy from the natives. They are handmade, unique, and cheap. No matter where you go, they will take U.S. dollars, and they will speak English (at least enough to tell you how much).

There are so many opportunities to buy great, low-cost gifts, you may want to bring extra luggage on your trip just to transport your stuff back home. Patty was very talented and was able to pack everything for our trip

home, but I had my doubts at the time. Next time, we may bring a bag specifically for bringing home the goods.

5.2 Carnival Critique

Patty and I had very few problems on our cruise. Probably the most noticeable problem, however, was the conflicting information we were getting from different sources. From one source we would hear that an event was taking place at this time and at this place. Another source would tell us it was going on at that time or that place. Carnival could work on that part. While you are traveling, just check with lots of people and do lots of looking around so you do not miss anything.

One example that burned us was "There will be a big party on the Lido deck tonight!" Ok...but which part? The Lido deck runs the length of the ship! We went to one end, met some other partygoers, and waited for the party that did not come. It turns out the party was in the middle of the boat, not at the end. We could have used that information!

Another small criticism was that Patty and I would have liked to see more couples activities. One of them, dancing lessons, were only held twice (as far as we can tell) at a half hour each. We could only make one because of our shore excursions.

5.3 Other Interesting Points

One nice surprise was that Carnival seemed interested in preserving the environment. I was expecting garbage being tossed overboard and the ship generally being a monument to waste. This was not the case. No garbage was thrown overboard (that we saw). The ship's crew had separate bins for different types of garbage. They encouraged you to re-use towels to save on laundry detergent at sea. In other words, they seemed to go beyond mere lip service for protecting the environment. It makes sense - the natural beauty of the ocean is what writes their paychecks. I say - way to go Carnival! Unlike most of corporate America, you seem to be able to look a little past your nose.

Speaking of America, as far as Patty and I could tell, only one American worked on the ship (he was one of the entertainment directors). Every other employee hailed from other countries. They could all speak good English, of course. Most of the "laborers" (waiters, laundry staff) seemed to come

from Thailand, Africa, or one of the Russian satellite countries. The officers came from Britain, Australia, and other European countries (the captain was Italian).

Most of the passengers, however, were American. As a very rough estimate, I would say that about 40% of them were retirement age, 40% or so were middle aged, and the last 20% were the younger crowd.

6 Conclusion

Our cruise experience was, in short, fantastic. We had a wonderful honeymoon on the Carnival Miracle. We recommend cruising to anybody who can afford it.

We just caution you to realize the full costs of the cruise, not just the cost of a stateroom. Keep in mind the tips we have given you in this paper, bring along a little bit of patience, be willing to have some fun, and you will have a great time.

Happy cruising!

A Appendix

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A.2 About the Author

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