



Sharing the joy of travel.



Cruising For The First Time
Mariner of the Seas
7 Night Mexican Riviera Cruise
May 2010
By
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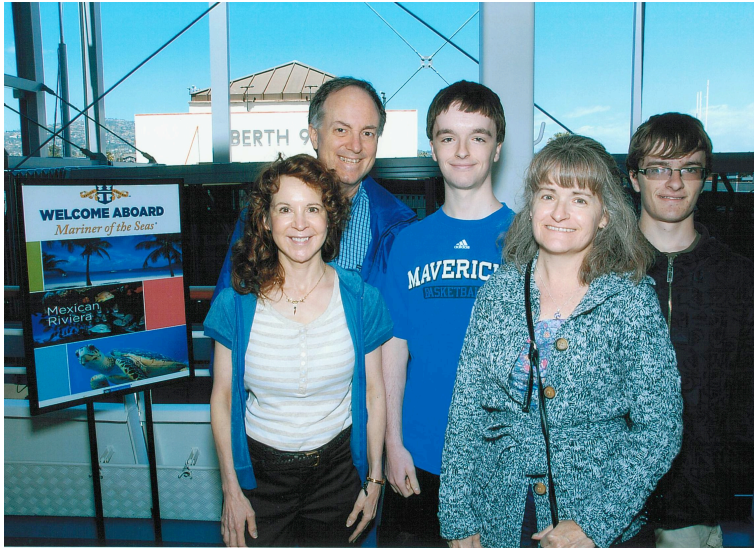
I have enjoyed traveling throughout the United States and internationally for over 20 years, but had never experienced a cruise until I took the 7 Night Mexican Riviera Cruise, offered by Royal Caribbean, in May.



My brother, Tim Larison, is a successful travel agent and he and his family often take cruises; he suggested that it would be fun for me to experience a cruise with his family. The price for the Royal Caribbean Mexican Riviera cruise was very reasonable; in fact, I was amazed at how inexpensive the cruise was and the fact that all meals were included. I was used to land tours in which only a few meals were included in the total

package. Also, the fact that I would not have to carry luggage from one location to another was very appealing to me.

We boarded the Mariner of the Seas on May 23 in Los Angeles. The boarding procedure was very quick and well organized; I was impressed with the size of the ship. It was nice to have our picture taken as we boarded (I am on the far left in this picture).



I had been somewhat apprehensive about the size of my stateroom; I had heard that the staterooms on cruise ships were very small and could be claustrophobic. My stateroom was an interior one with no windows. It is true that the staterooms are generally smaller than rooms at a hotel, but the bed was queen sized and there was room for a couch, desk, TV, etc. Everything in the room was efficiently organized for a small area; there were lots of storage areas to place my things. Sleeping at night was quite pleasant since there was a gentle rocking from the ship and the room was totally soundproof. The room was thoroughly cleaned each day and the room attendant, who could usually be found in the hallway near my room, was helpful in answering my questions about the ship.

When we left Los Angeles on a rather blustery day, it took me a few minutes to get used to the movement of the ship when I was walking and I felt a bit unsteady. Soon, I barely noticed the ship moving through the water. There were over 3000 people, of all ages, on the ship, but, because of the size of the ship, it did not seem crowded. One could choose to sit on the deck and read a book or participate in the many activities scheduled throughout the cruise. The deck was at times rather windy and I often sat in

the sun room near the pools for times of relaxation.



I liked the fact that there were activities for a variety of interests. Activities I participated in ranged from a lecture on the history of art to an ice skating show. There were also sports activities such as miniature golf, and even a library where I could check out books. The exercise area was filled with treadmills, elliptical trainers and other exercise equipment. I worked out on the treadmill every day and enjoyed looking out over the ocean while running. I also attended several exercise classes with personal trainers; I did find that some of these free sessions were set up to promote the purchase of special services, such as massages. Every evening elaborate musical productions took place in the main theater on the ship; these were very professional programs with experienced singers. Also, I enjoyed the trivia contests held each day; it was an opportunity to have fun as part of a team and meet new people.

Friends had informed me that there are lots of opportunities to eat on a cruise and they were right! There were specialty restaurants, such as Johnny Rockets, a 50's style diner with great hamburgers, as well as the main buffet restaurant, the Windjammer Cafe, which had a wide variety of food throughout each day/evening.

The dining rooms were more formal areas for evening meals of several courses.



The food and the service were great! For dinner, we sat with another family at a long table and enjoyed talking to them. Professional photographers took pictures of us, individually and as a group, at the "formal" dinners and I was so pleased with the results that I purchased several of the pictures. The photos are not inexpensive, but the quality is generally excellent. In addition to the restaurants and dining areas, you could get free ice cream cones, pizza, sandwiches and cookies anytime on the deck and the promenade. The long promenade also had a variety of shops; on the final day of the cruise, there were some good bargains and I purchased a few mementos.



We stopped at Cabo San Lucas, Mazatlan and Puerto Vallarta for shore excursions. At Cabo San Lucas and Mazatlan my brother had made arrangements with private vendors for transportation and a day at the beach. At Puerto Vallarta I went on my own with a ship excursion to an exclusive resort on the ocean. As soon as I got off the boat at Puerto Vallarta, I saw the bus waiting to take passengers to the resort. The ship excursions are well organized and mine had a guide who gave us a tour of Puerto Vallarta before we went on our way to the resort. At the resort the guide clearly explained where various services/ restaurants were located and where to meet to pick up the bus for the return trip. The day included a delicious buffet meal, towels, and free drinks. It was a gorgeous resort with several large pools and a beautiful beach with lounge chairs and umbrellas.



I thoroughly enjoyed my first cruise and would recommend taking a cruise for someone traveling alone or with a family. The cruises are reasonably priced; there are activities for every life style and I found it to be more relaxing than a land tour since I didn't have to worry about luggage, meals or transportation. I am now thinking about where I would like to go for my next cruise!