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Disney Cruise Line for Two

By Kate Abbott

As native Disneylanders, when my husband Brad and I decided to finally visit Walt Disney World for the first time, in January-February of 2006, we wanted to go all-out: We just had to add a three-night Disney Cruise onto the end of our week at Walt Disney World. Neither of us had ever been on a cruise before, but we had seen pictures of the ships and Castaway Cay, and wanted to experience them for ourselves, by ourselves. From the website and a Travel Channel special we watched about four times, I knew we'd be able to have plenty of fun together, even without kids.



The Disney Wonder in port at Nassau.



A beach for two.

We decided to spend the night before our cruise in Cape Canaveral, so we



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wouldn't have to worry about getting from WDW to Port Canaveral that morning. We stayed at the Radisson Resort at the Port (<http://www.radisson.com/capecanaveralfi>), a nice hotel with a free shuttle to and from the port, as well as free parking for our rental car for the duration of the trip.

The preparation came in handy, as we had an eventful pre-cruise morning. After eating breakfast at the hotel (the buffet was included in the price of our room) and visiting the wild parrots that live by the pool area, we headed back to our pink-painted room to get ready to leave. I stuck a motion-sickness-prevention patch behind Brad's ear and we started to get packed up. The only part of the cruise we were nervous about was Brad getting seasick (I'd been around small boats all my life, so I was only nervous for him). Within a minute of my sticking the patch on, he passed out! After whipping the patch off, he woke up, a little disoriented to be in a pink room, but was feeling normal again in minutes. I tossed out the evil patches and took a deep breath: I really needed some relaxation on the cruise! By the time we boarded our shuttle to the port, where I was entertained by an excited bridal party sharing our shuttle, we were both ready to celebrate just being fully conscious together.



Wild parrots also like to stay at the Radisson Resort at the Port.

The *Disney Wonder* was enormous and beautiful, which was amazing to me. Watching such a massive boat floating gracefully on the water, with its double smoke stacks (OK, one is a faux smoke stack) and tastefully subtle Mickey Mouse color scheme, I was reassured. It didn't seem like a giant kiddie playground—in fact, I felt like I should be wearing heels and a great, wide-brim hat as we made our entrance.





The spacious terminal entertains eager guests with a model ship and Disney cartoons.

The terminal was soothing, and I happily watched Donald Duck cartoons with the little kids nearby. (So much for my grown-up delusions.) I cast nervous glances at Brad, to make sure he was still upright and conscious and all, but he was having a good time, examining the detailed model of the ship. When we got to walk through the Mickey-icon-shaped tunnel, we were welcomed by Goofy in his finest sailor outfit. After walking up the gangway, we were both excited to finally be aboard!



Through the ears!

After being greeted by name when we entered the atrium lobby, we explored the ship for a bit, and were overly excited to see the Route 66-themed area (which includes the onboard nightclubs and lounges) because of its sign pointing to Disneyland—2,051 miles away! I tucked myself into a porthole window while Brad went to switch our dining rotation schedule so we could eat at Palo* (the upscale restaurant onboard, which is not included in your daily rotation, and is an additional \$10 per person surcharge, but well worth it—more on that later) on a certain night. I pitied the plain cruise ships docked next to us—our boat was much more stylish!



You can't find Ariel on just any cruise ship.

The cast member was able to accommodate our dining rotation wishes, and we happily set off to find our room, where our luggage had already been delivered. I marveled at the size—it was larger than I'd been expecting; there was even a couch. I peeked in the closet and found life jackets—we were really heading out to sea! The bathroom was ingenious; small, but contained the essentials: Disney-character toiletries.

After the safety drill, we found some lounge chairs outside and, with the horns sounding the first notes of "When You Wish Upon a Star," we were off! It was very secluded in our little area, and we felt like we were on a private cruise, watching a gorgeous sunset. Then we went to enjoy free ice cream!



Watching the sun set in the ocean while eating free ice cream - the perfect vacation!

About halfway through my cone, the wind picked up and we headed inside—and I started to get dizzy. Nevertheless, I wanted to check out the shopping seminar, so we went to that and got some free prizes, plus a coupon book for Nassau the next day. But, by the time we were in our cabin, all I wanted to do was lay down. Fortunately, there was an all-Disney movie channel and free room service! I was upset about missing our first dinner, which was going to be at Parrot Cay, but it was actually great to stay in and order whatever we wanted from room service—something I had never done before. Finishing off the fruit and cheese platter, pizzas, and chocolate-chip cookies from room service, we snuggled in to watch *The Little Mermaid* and looked forward to being in a new country the next day.

When I woke up the next morning, I felt much better, because the boat was already docked and I was getting a second chance to eat at Parrot Cay (this time for breakfast). We enjoyed our first meal out in public on the boat, which was also my first experience being seated with people we'd never met before. The couple we sat with had been on many cruises, and they raved about the Disney Cruise Line's food and atmosphere. They had been to Nassau many times, and were going to relax on the boat during the day. We had chosen not to do a Disney-sponsored shore excursion, but were going to head out on our own, walking around and seeing the historical sights. As I exclaimed over all of the breakfast choices, our tablemates regaled us with tales about their weight gains on long cruises. Since our cruise was only three days, I resolved not to worry and contentedly munched on my pastries.



Our first glimpse of the Bahamas.

We peeked outside and were greeted by a clear day in the Bahamas, and sunny yellow, pink, and turquoise-painted buildings. When we scrambled down the gangway, we were also greeted with humidity and what seemed like an entire town full of shops. We ducked our heads and got through the maze of shops in the entrance building, and then started our walking tour.



The view from Fort Fincastle.



I want to paint my house this color.



The Queen's Staircase is an impressive sight.



We ducked into this courtyard to cool off.

By the time our mini tour was over (visiting places such as Fort Fincastle, the Queen's Staircase, and many colorful buildings), I was ready to browse the jewelry shops. We picked up some good deals, using our coupon book obtained on the boat the night before, and were ready to head back. Having been on dry land all day, I was optimistically looking forward to eating dinner at Animator's Palette that evening. But, we also made sure to pick up some complimentary motion-sickness medicine from the medical center before heading to some onboard festivities.

We went to an art auction, where I enjoyed looking at fine-art paintings, sipping a Cosmo, and even bidding on a couple of pieces (all of which went far over our prices, but it was exciting to wave our paddles in the air). We had better luck at "pirate bingo," where we yelled "Arrrgh!" a lot and Brad won us free bicycle and snorkel gear rental for the next day, on Castaway Cay!

We headed to Animator's Palette to celebrate our success at bingo. It was a blast. We were seated with a family of four, and watching the kids react to our changing restaurant was one of the best parts of the evening. Of course, when either of the two little ones squealed, "Look, the colors are changing!" I wanted

to do the same. About halfway through dinner, we hit some large waves, but the restaurant and waitstaff were so entertaining, I was feeling pretty good. Then, amazingly, our super-friendly waiter brought a shocked Brad and me a chocolate-raspberry dessert, with "Congratulations!" written across it. I still don't know how he even knew the trip was in honor of our anniversary—I suspect the waiter overheard us tell our tablemates about it. I was impressed.

It was "Pirates *in* the Carribean" party night that evening, and we all got pirate bandanas at dinner. I was a little wobbly heading out, but tying my bandana around my head must have made me feel tougher, because I thoroughly enjoyed the fireworks and people-watching at the pirate party. Watching fireworks explode from our boat in the middle of the ocean, with total darkness all around us, was one of the highlights of our cruise.



I might be a little seasick, but it's "Pirates in the Caribbean" night, and I'm having fun.

When we arrived at Castaway Cay the next morning and peeked outside, we were relieved to find semi-clear skies. Rain loomed in the forecast, but we were docked right at the island, and thrilled to start exploring it together. The kids and parents beelined to the family beach, while we strolled leisurely, checking out the various sights. Of course, I had to explore the gift shop, but after that we turned in our bike rental certificate and took off together on a beautiful trail. I was pleased to find it was an easy trail to ride, made memorable for all the luscious plants surrounding us. We often felt like we were the only ones around, a welcome comfort from our previous week-long Walt Disney World extravaganza.

We tried snorkeling, but found that the upcoming storm had greatly reduced visibility underwater, so we headed to the adults-only beach. I pulled some low chairs to the water's edge, and we sat for an hour with our feet in the wet sand. When I waded in the turquoise water, I found that the sky and clouds rolling in looked lavender from my perspective—an amazing sight. We lounged together on the quiet adult beach for the rest of our time on the island.

I didn't want to leave my surreal-colored beach, but I was already looking forward to our last night: a round of Disney trivia, and dinner at Palo. During the trivia, we successfully tied for first place with two other families, earning ourselves medals. I reluctantly removed my prize, but it was worth it to get dressed up for dinner. The cast members advised us that we could expect some high waves that evening, so I popped some more motion-sickness medicine, and we tottered off to find Palo, located at the top of the ship.

We sat next to a window, spattered with the rain that had thankfully held off during the day. Our hilarious and thoughtful waiter surprised me by bringing me a black napkin, since it matched my outfit better, and took care to find out where we were from and what we liked. When he learned I was a vegetarian, he brought out different courses of food for both of us. I've rarely had such a selection of food I could eat at a restaurant—and this food just kept coming! We were both feeling a little naturally tipsy from all the rocking going on, so we skipped any alcohol, but I did splurge on "fancy" water and the best cappuccino I have ever had. All of the food, except for my special beverages, was included with the \$10 surcharge, and the drinks we paid for were very reasonable. By the time we had devoured all we could of our shared chocolate soufflé and I had taken my last sip from the rich coffee, I realized the evening had been even more fun and delicious than I had expected. Plus, we had extra reasons to celebrate our last night of the cruise: I had successfully gotten through our nice dinner without falling off my chair, and, ironically, Brad had made it through the whole cruise without getting seasick at all.



After dinner, we found swans in our cabin!

Our last night at sea, the waves were huge. From our cozy cabin, we listened to the ship and felt our room sway. We watched Disney movies, exclaimed how stuffed we still were from the fantastic food, and, content from a day of relaxing on a tropical island, gave thanks we had been able to go on this cruise together. Even though we were a twosome, without any little kids around, we chose not to take part in the most mature pastimes: we didn't go to Atlantis to gamble, share a bottle of wine at Palo, visit the spa, or hit any of the numerous nightclubs. But, being together on the *Disney Wonder*, we only had to act as grown-up as we felt—and that made it the perfect cruise for us, since we're both a little goofy. And, I'm not too grown-up to admit: I've got a craving for another batch of complimentary room-service-delivered cookies!





Grown-ups who want to gamble can head to Atlantis while on Nassau; we enjoyed the view of it on our walk.

**[Editor's note: Palos and shore excursions through Disney can be booked ahead of time. Cruise documents can also be filled out and printed prior to sailing. Just go to http://disneycruise.disney.go.com/dcl/en_US/index and click on My Disney Cruise:*

75 days prior for new cruisers (after final payment is made) or 90 days prior for Castaway Cay Cruisers (returning cruisers) or guests booked in a suite (also after final payment is made.)]

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Binnie Betten, Founder

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