

Adventure Is Out There: Disney Cruise Line Shore Excursion Review

by Michele Dakho, PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)

Disney Cruise Line does an amazing job creating activities and areas onboard for every one in the family and offering "something for everyone."

The level of comfort and confidence you have in the Disney Cruise Line experience is unparalleled, but what happens when you pull into port and leave your magical bubble of perfection? What do you do if the "something" you chose for your excursion isn't for everyone?

Having experienced multiple cruises and even more excursions, there are very important lessons I've learned. Some were harder lessons to learn than others and some far more costly, but eventually I did learn them and now our "on land" portion of our vacation can be just as enjoyable as our "at sea" experience.

□ Planning our honeymoon was almost as much work as planning our wedding. This was our first cruise and prior to my work as a vacation planner. We carefully and strategically investigated the ports and labored over choosing excursions. This was our big adventure, something we've always wanted to do, if we were Carl and Ellie, this cruise was our Paradise Falls. We booked a suite on the Disney Magic and foolishly spared no expense (we were newbies â€¦ we didn't know any better!)

□ I wish I could tell you it was a fairytale and that every penny was the best penny spent, but instead I'll tell you the truth. Like in marriage and in life...there were valuable lessons to be learned, here are the top 5 things we've learned about excursions (and life).

Even the best laid plans go astray: In 2008 our itinerary was the Western Caribbean. There wasn't a ton of things that interested us in the ports but my husband had his heart set on an underwater motor scooter in Cozumel, because, you know...if James Bond did it, he probably should too. I've always been fascinated with the ocean and as a person who can't go underwater without plugging my nose, the idea of scooting around the ocean floor with a waterproof helmet and my own personal water supply seemed pretty cool.

□ Fast forward to our excursion date, when we ventured off the ship for our fantastic, long-awaited adventure. The reality of our circumstances quickly set in when we noticed the sky was overcast and to say it was

"breezy" was an understatement. The winds caused a strong undercurrent that wouldn't allow the motor scooters to stand upright and so the excursion was cancelled. So there we were, anchored in the middle of the big blue world with no scooter extravaganza (that never happens to James Bond!)

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□Your "something" might not be for everyone: Although the excursion was his decision, when it was modified suddenly everything unraveled for my husband. The tour provided offered everyone complimentary snorkel equipment. I was totally shocked when my husband, who chose this excursion, was refusing to get into the same water that said excursion was supposed to take place in.

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□All of a sudden James Bond was gone and the child from the Jaws era took his place. He was completely convinced there was a rogue shark in the water that was just waiting to eat him. Not wanting to feed into his flair for the dramatic, I grabbed the snorkel gear and headed into the water. I thought by showing him a girl like me wasn't afraid, he'd certainly follow suit.

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□After the close examination of the gear ("I have to put my mouth there?" "Has this been cleaned?" "Have you had any cases of the swine flu?") he eventually jumped off the boat and into the water. When I saw him, he was in a severe panic, hyperventilating and thrashing around like he was, indeed, being eaten by a shark. As it turned out, he had a crack in his mask and his snorkel and was taking in more water than the lower decks of the Titanic. After this "near death" experience, (which of course becomes a tad more dramatic each time the story is told) he swore off the ocean that tried to kill him and vowed to only do excursions on dry land.

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□Lay expectations before excursions: Years, and several cruises later, we learned how to communicate with each other regarding vacation expectations ("Yes, I am going to lay by the adult pool and read my book, and no, I don't want you asking me every 3 minutes what I'm reading and if it's good") and we applied that to our excursion choices as well.

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□We came to grips with the fact that we might be paying for an excursion that not both of us may enjoy and we had to be ok with that before we paid and made it official. Sometimes agreeing to disagree was the only option. With this decided, I moved into crisis prevention mode when I saw an excursion that struck my fancy.

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□Proactively Prevent Crisis: When I read about the Caribbean Sea Safari excursion and saw that a speedboat would take us to Turtle Cove where we could swim with sea turtles, I knew this was the time to try again. I

lured my husband in with the appeal of the speedboat, the promise that I wouldn't force him to snorkel and the appeal of the exclusive visit to "water island" and with that our Caribbean Sea Safari excursion was booked.

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□ Since the snorkel equipment was the problem the first time (allegedly wink, wink, nudge, nudge) we compromised and decided to invest in our own snorkel equipment to avoid a repeat of the previous experience. As it happens we found a great deal on equipment at the Ron Jon Surf Shop in Cocoa Beach prior to our cruise. We had our masks and fins fitted and ready to go while we were on dry land so when we got to the water, all we had to do was put everything on and jump in.

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□ Facts might help you overcome fears: Although I wasn't allowed to pressure him into participating no one said anything about a dose of good ole' fashioned common sense. All my talk of the wonder of the ocean did nothing to change his opinion so I decided to appeal with the voice of reason.

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□ I calmly laid out the facts: this excursion was booked through Disney Cruise Line, so you know this company is the best and provides the highest level of safety and customer satisfaction. The tour operators lived here and did this on a daily basis, often many times a day. If there was anything they were unsure of, the excursion would be modified or cancelled.

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□ We weren't the only people on this excursion, so you didn't have to be the fastest swimmer to outrun the shark, you just had to be faster than the slowest person on the excursion (yes, this "logic" actually did work on my husband).

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□ Judging by his level of confidence in having his own snorkel equipment and his level of excitement over the Virgin Breeze, the speedboat that was taking us to Turtle Cove, I was certain this was going to be the day he jumped back into the Big Blue World and discovered the joys of snorkeling

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□ When the boat anchored, the fear set back in and there he was, on the boat with the staff while I was in the water. Sticking to the deal, I kept my end of the bargain and went to enjoy the excursion. Thirty-Five minutes into the forty-five minute excursion, I found my husband swimming up next to me, pointing at a turtle. He went from being on the boat afraid, to acting like Charles Muntz, searching for the mysterious bird.

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□ I don't know if it was the planning ahead, the pre-excursion

agreements, the facts, the expectations or the compromise that made this excursion work and frankly, I don't care. This "formula" for success has served us well in our thirteen cruises and I hope it continues to work for the future. Not every adventure is successful, but we know adventure is out there, and we can find it together.

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