

## Going for the Gold... Castaway Club Status That is: A Disney Cruise Line Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Our most recent Disney cruise around the eastern Mediterranean marked a real landmark for us ...our first as gold Disney Castaway Club members!

For those of you wondering what on earth I'm talking about -- allow me to explain...

Disney Cruise Line's Castaway Club is their cruiser loyalty program. Most cruise lines have them, although as always, there's "The Disney Difference." Your membership tier of the Castaway Club depends on the number of Disney cruises you've completed, whereas often with others, they also look at the number of nights you've cruised. This is something I do wish Disney would do, and I'll explain why in a moment. You're automatically enrolled into the Castaway Club as soon as you complete your first cruise. If you've completed between one and four cruises, you're a silver member. Once you complete between five and nine cruises, you become gold members, which is the level we attained on our most recent cruises. The coveted platinum membership is available to those who've completed ten or more Disney cruises (such as author Jennifer Marx).

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□ Now why would I like to see the number of nights you've cruised included in the calculations? Well, if you took 10 three-night cruises totalling 30 nights, then you'd be a platinum member at the conclusion of those cruises. To date, we've completed six cruises, totalling 40 nights. I rest my case!

□ The member benefits you get as soon as you become a silver member include the ability to make your bookings for activities such as shore excursions, spa treatments and adult dining at 90 days before your cruise, rather than the 75 days beforehand that first time cruisers get. You'll also get a lanyard for your Key to the World card, there will be a gift waiting for you in your stateroom, and you'll have your own check-in line in the terminal.

What did we get in addition when we graduated to the gold level of membership? Well, gold Castaway members still get the gift in your stateroom and the same check-in line as silver when they arrive at the terminal, although they get a snazzy gold lanyard, as opposed to a silver one. There is one notable change before you sail. You can make your

activity bookings 105 days prior to your sailing.

☐ One thing that is worth mentioning at this point is that you do need to be paid in full to make those activity bookings, regardless of membership level. For most cruisers, the regular payment deadline is 75 days in advance of your sailing. If you're lucky enough to be sailing in stateroom categories R, S, T or V (concierge level), then you have to pay in full 90 days ahead of your sailing date. This means that, as a Castaway Club member, your activity booking window can open up before your actual paid in full deadline. I must admit when our travel agent told me when the payment was due, I was a bit confused at first, saying to her, "That's a month ahead of what I expected," but of course, since we wanted to take advantage of that early activity booking window, she was right. It's something to keep in mind, particularly if you're working to a budget, as that could be a nasty shock.

☐ As soon as we boarded, we had a very nice gift waiting for us in our stateroom, and this did differ a bit, as they were giving out backpacks, and depending which tier of membership you were, you got either a silver, gold, or platinum one. I have to confess I never saw anyone with a platinum version, so I'm not entirely sure what color theirs was, but I saw a lot of silver ones, and a fair few other gold ones. It was a nice touch, and again I like how Disney had set out the differentials between the membership grades. We also got a door decoration, along with a wipe away marker, that we could use to leave messages to others, and a souvenir book of our Mediterranean cruise to record our thoughts, and perhaps to keep our photos in, which was a nice touch -- a really useful gift.

☐ We spotted those immediately as we entered our room, but it took us a little longer to find our invitation to the onboard reception for gold and platinum members, a very nice addition to the list of perks. Ours was on our first day at sea, which was the next morning, in Fathoms, part of the newly remodelled After Hours adult district on the Disney Magic. It's worth saying here that if you take a three night cruise, you won't get this benefit, as it's only available on cruises of four nights or longer.

☐ We were there at the appointed hour, and we were ushered inside, anxious to see what awaited us. I wasn't surprised that Captain Mickey was there to meet and greet people, and as the crew members told us, it was likely to be the shortest line you were likely to see for him all cruise, and they were right. We had our photos taken within a couple of minutes!

☐ Now I wasn't sure what else to expect, but I should've known better, as you can always rely on Disney to throw a party! We were offered drinks, with the selection including bellinis, mimosas, and champagne, and then

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there were the finger foods -- fruit, savory items such as shrimp in a tomato sauce, brie and grapes, salmon mousse, and mixed peppers. I tried one of everything (research purposes of course!) and was very impressed with all of them. Those with a sweet tooth could get cookies and Mickey bars, so you certainly didn't have to leave hungry. It was a great shame we had Palo brunch booked next. Had I known about the reception beforehand, I might have made a different Palo booking - so much good food to eat!

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□The other big gold Castaway Club bonus on board is the lovely 10% off merchandise in the shops on board, which I can promise you we made great use of!

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□So if gold is this good, what do you get for platinum? While we've yet to experience it for ourselves (one day!), platinum adds priority check-in with usually very short lines, boarding in the first group, and even a special waiting area if you're boarding at Port Canaveral. You can also expect invites to exclusive events, and you get a complimentary Palo dinner, which is another nice perk.

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□Now here I do need to mention a couple of other perks for all Castaway Club members that sadly we don't get in the UK, such as the Compass Newsletter and a toll-free number to use.

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□We loved our first experience as gold Castaway Club members, and are already working our way towards platinum membership with another two cruises already booked for 2015!

*About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)*

Article last updated: 11-06-2014

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