

Pompeii: Mysteries Revealed

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

There can't be many places in the world where you can step back 2,000 years in time and see Roman remains in every direction you look.

Perhaps that's why, out of all the wonderful places that we would visit around the Mediterranean on the Disney Magic, Pompeii was among those I was most looking forward to. It didn't disappoint, but the weather certainly did. The rain must have seen us coming, as the clouds looked threatening throughout the bus journey there, but it was only when we stepped off and headed for the entrance that it decided to start raining. Fortunately, although we experienced some heavy downpours, the rain wasn't constant and it's just as well, as there weren't many places to shelter!

To understand what you'll see at Pompeii today, you first need to understand its history. A wealthy city, it was filled with elegant private buildings and even today, you can see the entrances to some of them. Following a rebellion against the Romans, Pompeii lost its independence, becoming first a Roman municipality and then a colony, but during all that time, expansion of the city continued until the fateful day of 24 August 79 A.D.

A massive eruption of nearby Mount Vesuvius, which today still dominates the landscape of the whole area, buried the city for centuries. Pompeii was hit by a mixture of ash, poisonous gas and white hot stones, all of which combined to bury both buildings and bodies in layers of debris up to seven metres (23 feet) deep. And that's how it stayed until the early 18th century, when accidental archaeological finds led to the uncovering of the city. Today around 60 hectares (150 acres) has been excavated and work still continues on finding more parts of Pompeii.

The first things you see as you approach Pompeii are the massive city walls, and that prevents you from seeing any of the remains inside. At first glance I wasn't sure how much we would actually see, but patience is definitely a virtue here. As soon as you get a bit further on, the whole city starts to appear in front of you and with every turn, you find a bit more.

Like any major city, there were shops along the streets and even the paving stones and remains of the drainage system can be seen today. It's fascinating to see things that we take for granted today, like sewers, which were first developed by the Romans more than 2,000 years ago.

At first I thought I was imagining what I was seeing, but our guide pointed out the carriage tracks in the roads. As you stood there, you could just picture horses and carriages careering towards you, quite an eerie feeling!

Of course, entertainment was a major part of city life, with a large theatre still visible on the site. Our guide told us that open air performances were held here a couple of years ago and the tickets disappeared in no time. I'm not surprised, as that must have been a unique experience; enjoying theatre in a space that last hosted plays in the Roman era.

Another form of entertainment was the (former) brothel, which our guide called "the ice cream parlour," as we had the delicate ears of youngsters in our party! This had the longest line of anywhere in Pompeii and it's worth the wait. The frescoes in there just have to be seen to be believed!

The real highlight of the tour for me was seeing one of the private villas with its ornate interior designs. It gave you a taste of just how opulent the city must have been in its heyday with brightly colored mosaics, and frescoes all over the walls, but perhaps the most fascinating part of the building was the display inside - a mummified body. We'd already seen a documentary explaining that a lot of bodies were found; most of them huddled into the fetal position, as they were hiding from the coming onslaught from Mount Vesuvius.

Our tour wound up in the Forum, a huge area for public meetings all that time ago. Here you can see the remains of all the most important buildings in Pompeii, from the public treasury to the Temple of Apollo, along with the finance exchange and the Senate house, where the town Council assembled. There was so much in that area that it was almost too much to take in.

All too soon, it was time to leave Pompeii and that's the real shame of a cruise, you just never get to spend enough time in the places you really love. I could have browsed every single nook and cranny of the city, easily spending a full day there, but tragically the bus was calling us. I know there's much more to see at Pompeii and I hope that one day we get the chance to go back and experience it all. It really is a unique experience in the world and an amazing opportunity to see how life would have been in Roman times.

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

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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!](#)

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