

## Disney's Inaugural Mediterranean Cruise: A Magical Wrap-Up

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

We have safely returned from our Magic-al time cruising around the Mediterranean with Disney and life is back to normal. The washing is (finally!) done, the house and garden are back in some semblance of order and I'm being reminded that I really should finish telling you all about the rest of our 11 nights on the Disney Magic in the heart of Europe.

When we left off a couple of weeks ago, we had a string of ports ahead of us. This is when I became very glad that we'd opted for the 11-night cruise, as opposed to the 10-night version. The extra night is, not surprisingly, spent at sea and it broke up the feeling we were starting to get of an endless series of ports. On the 10-night version, you'll be calling at all seven ports in seven days without a break. A lot of those ports are long days as well, as they're often a good hour or more drive away from the big cities that most people want to see.

I won't say much about the ports we visited, as they all warrant an article in their own right □ and some will get that honor in the next few weeks. What I will tell you is that all the ports we called at were excellent and the general consensus amongst passengers seemed to be that we wouldn't change anything, although a few people felt that perhaps the stop at Palermo could be removed in favor of two days at Civitavecchia (for Rome).

The shore excursions did vary considerably in their quality. Some I couldn't fault, while others had failings with the transport □ the jetfoil between Naples and Sorrento is not an experience I ever want to repeat. It was more challenging than any thrill ride at a Disney park, or any other park for that matter! Although all our guides knew their subject thoroughly and were full of interesting information about all the places we visited, some did a better job than others of keeping the group together and at pacing the tour. On more than one occasion, we were rushed when we would have preferred to have taken things more slowly. Having said that, I didn't regret taking any of the shore excursions and all of them were a great way to see a lot of each place in a short space of time.

As perhaps you'd expect, the first ever Disney cruise around the Mediterranean attracted a lot of interest at every port we visited. We had a great welcome everywhere we stopped. Some ports went to a lot

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more trouble than others, with a band awaiting us at Olbia, special shops on the quayside at Marseilles and best of all, a firework display just for the Disney Magic at Villefranche. That was quite something to see and an amazing send-off, as we set sail shortly afterwards.

Of all the ports we stopped at, Villefranche (for Monte Carlo, Monaco, Nice, and Eze), and La Spezia (for Florence and Pisa), were probably my favorites. Not only were they the stops for some breathtaking cities, but the ports themselves were beautiful. Ironically, they were also the only two ports we had to tender at (be ferried ashore by small boat). This was something I'd never experienced before and I wasn't sure how well it would work, but the system was superb. It helps to be on a Disney shore excursions on the days you tender, as they really do have the process for getting you ashore and back on board sorted out well for their tour groups.

Enough about the ports of call. A lot of our time was spent on board the ship and these were some of our favorite times, despite the bad weather that we ran into. It turns out that the Mediterranean is known for changeable weather and it can be very difficult to predict what's just around the corner. That was exactly the situation we found ourselves in when we left Palermo. At first, everything seemed smooth and then suddenly things got very rough indeed! The same thing happened the following night, although we did have an announcement by Captain Tom to warn us in advance. Apparently the night before, they'd had no warning about the rough weather. The moral of this story is to make sure that if you're prone to sea sickness, be sure to bring some tablets with you. For those two nights, they were the most important things we packed!

As you'd perhaps guess, the cruise was used to showcase a lot of new attractions on the ship, including three new stage shows of varying quality. We didn't think much of "Disney's The Art of the Story," designed to show the various elements of stories through some Disney classics. We felt there was too much focus on the newer films and somehow, the show just didn't gel for us.

We had no such complaints about "When Mickey Dreams," a Cirque du Soleil-like performance based around Mickey's dreams, and using the music from the retired and much-missed Tapestry of Dreams parade at Epcot. This brought me to tears and ranks in the top three of my favorite experiences on board the Disney Magic. I hope it will become a permanent feature for future cruises, although that does seem in doubt, as the performers come from Marseilles. It remains to be seen if they'll head back to the Caribbean when the Magic does.

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I mentioned three top experiences and one of the other entries has to be Palo. This restaurant continues to provide the best food -- and service -- on board, and is a real culinary treat. On this cruise we were able to sample the brunch and the afternoon tea for the first time and, although we enjoyed both, the brunch really was the scene stealer. I don't think I've ever been presented with so many different foods to choose from so early in the morning! We had no need to eat until the evening, after sampling pretty much everything that was offered.

Before the cruise, the one thing I was really looking forward to was Formal Night. I mean, when else can a girl dress up in her finery? It lived up to all my expectations and I loved the way that you could have your photos taken with backdrops of the Magic and some of the wonderful places we would be visiting. It made for some unique souvenirs and we certainly made sure to purchase all of our photos from Formal Night!

All too soon, our cruise was over and we were back in Barcelona, ready to disembark. We found this part the biggest anti-climax of the whole 11 nights. We just got up, went to breakfast and then walked off the ship. No banners saying "Til We Meet Again" as we'd had on our three-night cruise, and no crew members waving us off the ship. It was a shame, as the cruise had been superb and yet it was such a drab way to end it.

We'd pre-booked the transfers through Disney to the airport and, although we had a wait for the bus of about 40 minutes, trust me, we did far better than those who did it themselves and went for taxis. The waits there were well over an hour!

The one thing I will treasure most, along with the amazing places we visited and the superb facilities, meals, and shows on board the Disney Magic, were the great people we met during the cruise. They really made the 11 nights and it was lovely to meet so many like-minded Disney fans. Having experienced our first Inaugural Disney cruise, we'll be keeping our eye open for the next one, wherever it may take the Magic, and we may well see you on board!

*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!](#)*

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