

Caching in on a Cruise: Geocaching During a Disney Cruise

by Brian White, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Discouraged by the additional cost of port excursions? Overwhelmed by the choices? Just want to get out and discover a little local flavor that the various ports of call have to offer without the rest of the passengers tagging along? Perhaps you should check out geocaching!

Geocaching is basically a high-tech treasure hunt. Instead of searching for the proverbial 'X marks the spot' using a map and compass, though, you head out the door armed with latitude and longitude coordinates and a GPS receiver to help you find the treasure.

Thousands of people take part in geocaching every day. They start by looking up coordinates to a cache location on the Internet and then use their GPS receiver to guide them to the treasure, or cache, which was hidden by another geocacher. The coordinates could lead to a local park, a museum, or the top of a mountain -- the adventure is largely up to you!

While at first blush it may sound very simple, once you arrive near the cache coordinates you must then rely on your treasure hunting skills, as the GPS receiver may only get you to within 20 or 30 feet of the cache. While geocaching rules don't allow a cache to be buried, it may be hidden beneath sticks, a log or palm fronds, or otherwise camouflaged. Cache "hides" can run the gamut from very simple to deviously difficult.

Geocaches also vary in size from a large plastic container down to a thimble-sized magnetic container. A traditional cache might consist of a Tupperware container with a logbook and small prizes inside. Once you find the cache, you sign the logbook and may take something from the cache, leaving something else in its place for the next treasure hunter. Once back at home, you can also log your find online, which allows you to easily maintain a virtual logbook of all of your adventures, along with maps and pictures that you upload.

While older children and adults will likely be more interested in the journey and the search for the cache, don't be surprised if the little ones take longer to choose a prize than it took to find the cache!

On the geocaching website, each cache is rated on a 5-point scale for both the difficulty of the journey to the cache location and the difficulty in locating the cache itself. This allows you to tailor your cache hunts to your crew's desire for a challenge!

Why Cruise Caching?

I often use geocaching as a tour guide when traveling, and I'm frequently amazed at the places we've "discovered" while on the road. Parks that even the locals don't know about, waterfalls, caves, even a model railroad in the middle of the woods -- you can find them all while geocaching. You'll find interesting statues and landmarks, great vistas, and even have the chance to solve puzzles and receive history lessons along the way.

When we took our first Disney Cruise aboard the Wonder in January 2009, I knew I wanted to explore Nassau, but didn't want to have to sign up for an excursion. So, naturally, I let other geocachers become my virtual tour guide. They led me on an extensive walking tour while stopping for a several caches: in front of the Governor's mansion, visiting Parliament Square, taking in the view from Fort Fincastle atop Bennet's Hill, and learning about the Battle of Nassau while visiting the British Colonial Hilton. All this was made possible by the efforts of geocachers I hadn't even met. A little over a year has passed, and there are now 14 geocaches on the island of Nassau for you to find.

We've recently booked our second cruise for February 2011 aboard the Magic heading to the Western Caribbean, and we're looking forward to finding some of the 18 caches in Key West, the 36 in Grand Cayman, and the 14 in Cozumel. We know we'll find some great spots for enjoying the local flavor of the Caribbean!

There are even geocaches on Castaway Cay -- we found two when we visited in 2009. However, for a fun hunt for the kids, try your hand at hiding a temporary geocache -- bring along some pirate trinkets, put them in a cache container, and hide it for the kids to find before they head to the pirate night dinner aboard the ship.

Getting Started with Geocaching

To get your feet wet, head to www.geocaching.com -- here you'll find everything you need to know about this great hobby. Choose a geocaching username and create a free account. You can then view geocaches in your area, and then after your hunt you can log your experiences on the website as well.

Simply plug in your zip code, and you'll see the closest geocaches in your area. And lest you think you'll need to travel far, geocaching.com lists over one million active geocaches worldwide!

Next, you'll need to borrow or purchase a GPS receiver. A GPS unit

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typically costs between \$70 and \$500, depending on the feature set you're after, such as auto-routing, mapping, or simply a larger screen. There are even geocaching-ready GPS units now, including the Geomate Jr., which comes pre-loaded with 250,000 cache listings and does away with all of the wiz-bang features of its expensive brothers while keeping its operation as simple as possible for the new geocacher. After that, you're off and running on your own adventure!

The Geocaching Experience

One of the great aspects of geocaching is getting out on the trail with others. We've introduced many people to geocaching, and now more often go with friends than without.

To add to the social aspect of geocaching, there are also events associated with the geocaching; camp outs and barbecues, competitive tournaments held each year, and, of course, the impromptu meetings with other geocachers on the trail.

Are you ready to be taken to fantastic locations that you would've never known about? Ready to have an impromptu tour guide when on vacation, or just need to pick a spot to get out and stretch your legs on a long drive? Join us on the geocaching hunt, and you'll have a winning solution to the kids' "I'm bored" mantra this summer!

About The Author: Brian is a mechanical engineer, but is often found wandering in the woods with his wife and two children. He has found nearly 1600 geocaches in 25 states and three countries.

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