

Magic in the Mediterranean: The Disney Cruise Line Mediterranean Cruise

by Kim LaPaglia, PassPorter Guest Contributor

In May 2010, our family embarked on a dream vacation. We flew to Barcelona, Spain, and then sailed for 10 nights aboard the Disney Magic. The voyage around the Mediterranean took us to sights we had only dreamed about seeing. I still can't believe that we toured such wonderful Old World places as Pompeii, Rome, Pisa, and Valletta.

We had sailed with the Disney Cruise Line to the Bahamas and Caribbean. Yet the preparation for a European cruise took much more planning. If you are considering a Mediterranean (or Baltic) cruise or are fortunate to already have one booked, don't forget the following:

- Get your passports early and make copies of all important documents. Take one set of copies with you and leave the other set with a trusted friend or family member.

- Check and re-check your flight arrangements. We flew with Delta and while I was pre-occupied with worry over the Icelandic volcano creating havoc with our airline schedule, I neglected to keep an eye on our flights. When I went to check-in online for our flight, our seats were no longer together. My 11-year-old son was at the back of the plane! This was our first trans-Atlantic flight, so seating arrangements were important to us. We did get it worked out so that my son and I sat together while my husband sat behind us. Learn from my mistake and even if the weather is cooperating, keep an eye on all of your flights. Our return trip had also changed!

- * Pack snacks in your carry-on. It's a long time between barely adequate meals on the flight, and travel delays may have you running to a connecting flight. We took lots of peanut butter crackers to help with low-sugar spells.

- * Stay healthy. Use hand sanitizer on the airplane. Just pack it in a quart-size bag and put it in with other liquids that need to clear security. Skip the ice with your cold beverages. I saw a horrifying story about filthy airplane ice machines prior to our trip. Any preventative measures to avoid getting sick on an airplane are worth it to me.

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* Take a travel neck pillow and small travel blanket. It will help to relax on the plane even if you are unable to sleep. Often the cabin can be very chilly and a blanket is much more comfortable than a jacket on an overnight flight.

* Research the ports-of-call thoroughly. To save money, we did all the ports on our own with the exception of Tunis. In Tunisia, we took a Disney Cruise Line tour. The Med cruise is port-intensive so choose your favorite sights to see and then scale back on other days. For instance, we spent a 12-hour day touring Rome, but in Valletta, Malta, we got up to see the ship sail into the Grande Harbour, then rested in our stateroom and finally walked into the walled city to see St. John's Co-Cathedral.

* Know your history. We watched documentaries on Rome, Pompeii, Carthage, etc. in order to have a better appreciation of the places that we would visit. This was a great way to capture our then 10-year-old son's interest. He was captivated by what he saw in Europe and these "history lessons" really helped him appreciate the time he stood standing in places as grand as Rome's Colosseum.

* Call your bank and credit card companies to let them know that you will be traveling out of the country. Let them know you will be touring Europe. I did this a couple days before our departure.

* Know how to use the ATM machine when you reach your destination. After we got our luggage in Barcelona, we stopped at the BancoMat to get some Euros. The machine was a bit confusing even though I had read how to use one. Still, it was nice to get Euros in order to tip our driver and bell services at the hotel.

* Take a cheat sheet of basic phrases in the language of each country that you will be visiting. I made copies for each family member. Even if you only use "hello" in the native language, it is a courteous gesture. In Rome's crowded subway and train stations, we got the most use out of "scusi," meaning "excuse me" in Italian.

* Dress appropriately for touring. If you plan to visit any churches, you'll need to have your shoulders and knees covered. I wore capris

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most days. Check the restrictions for the places that you plan to visit. For instance, St. John's Co-Cathedral did not allow heels of any kind due to the delicate marble floors. I saw some women removing cute sandals and wearing paper booties into the cathedral.

* Make plans to arrive Europe at least one day prior to your sailing date. Our flight arrived Barcelona in the early morning. After a night without sleep, we were exhausted. After checking into the hotel, we got breakfast, waited for our room to be ready and then against all advice to the contrary, we took naps. And we felt so much better. We had sandwiches for dinner, enjoyed the sights from the hotel's rooftop deck, went shopping, and selected delicious chocolate-covered cookies for late-night snacks. We went to bed early and it was a good thing we'd bought those cookies. We all woke about 3:00 am, absolutely starved. A few cookies did the trick and we went back to sleep. We woke well-rested and ready to meet the Disney Magic in Barcelona.

Bon Voyage!

About The Author: Kim LaPaglia is one of the inaugural Disney Moms Panelists. In 2009, she served as the DCL Specialist for www.disneyworldmoms.com. Kim shares more of her cruise experience at her blog, http://stopamoment.typepad.com/disney_journeys/.

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