

## Cruising Without Mickey?: Comparing Other Cruise Lines to Disney Cruise Line

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

It was with some trepidation that we stepped aboard our first non-Disney cruise earlier this year.

By this point, we'd completed four cruises with Disney, taking us to places as far apart as the Mediterranean, Caribbean, and Alaska, and we'd become very used to the Disney way of doing things at sea. How would we cope with another cruise line? The answer was, surprisingly well and better than we thought we would.

First, why were we cruising with another company? Put simply, because Disney doesn't cruise around the Norwegian fjords, and they're also not (yet!) part of the amazing deals we get through one of our supermarkets here, which meant that the store's loyalty program paid for the majority of our cruise. Now if only Disney did that..

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□The line we chose was P&O, and I will be honest, I didn't know much about them before that, but once we were booked, I set about finding out more. They're actually celebrating their 175th anniversary this year, so they're a company with quite a history. Now a division of the much larger Carnival Corp., they operate a total of seven ships, some accommodating up to 3,000 passengers, like the Azura, which we sailed on, while others carry much smaller numbers, around 700 people. They even have three adults-only ships, although sadly we didn't get one of those for our cruise. However, that really didn't matter, as the vast majority of people on board were adults.

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□That's the first huge difference we noticed with Disney. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there weren't many families on board, instead much of the make-up of the ship was either middle-aged or pensioners. A lot of them also appeared to have quite an extensive cruising history. Ask anyone if it was their first cruise, and they'd say no, and immediately reel off a list of where they'd sailed to before. It was slightly disconcerting, and even more so was the reaction when we said we were Disney cruisers. There was definitely some snobbery around that, and a complete lack of understanding of what Disney cruises were all about.

The second we boarded, we noticed that the theming on the Azura wasn't up to the level of Disney, but my goodness, they tried. Their atrium was still quite spectacular, and as the cruise wore on, I

discovered more about the art on the ship on a special tour. I loved the way that one restaurant had portraits made out of nothing but food. It's the sort of thing Disney would do, so obviously other cruise lines also know that the little details can make all the difference.

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□The one thing I was absolutely dreading on this cruise was throwing open the door to our cabin, having heard so much about how big Disney's rooms are compared to other ships. I had absolutely nothing to worry about. Our room was a lovely size, and we actually thought it felt bigger than anything we'd had before with Disney.

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□We suspect some of that was down to the design of the room, which seemed to be packed with storage space. We absolutely loved the huge wardrobe, opposite the bathroom door, which was large enough to store our three suitcases. Although the bathroom wasn't a split one, it was perfectly adequate for our needs, and the balcony was definitely a lot larger than its equivalent on Disney. All in all, we felt the cabins were actually much nicer than on Disney, something I never expected to say.

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□My major disappointment this cruise was the lack of rotational dining. I didn't realise how much I loved this system, until we didn't have it any longer. In a way, it was nice to have the same table in the same restaurant each night, as we always knew where we were going, but we had to make an effort to visit the other restaurants for lunch or breakfast, and I would have preferred to have experienced them for dinner.

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□The food quality was all over the place. Some meals were superb, while others were sublime, and in one example, downright awful. However, having said that, I can't say that Disney necessarily scores that much better, as that sounds very similar to our experience on our seven-night Alaskan cruise.

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□Interestingly, we felt that the restaurants on board the Azura that required a cover charge were very similar in quality to Palo. We didn't bother comparing them to Remy, as obviously you pay a lot more for that experience, so it didn't seem fair. However, both Seventeen, their adult-only restaurant, and Sindhu, their Indian restaurant, were first class, both in terms of the food, the setting, and the service. That was a pleasant surprise, as I really didn't expect them to match Disney in this respect, but they did.

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□The only thing on the food and drink side that we weren't impressed with were the charges for the soft drinks with your meals. We really have been spoiled by Disney in that regard, and it did feel as if P&O was desperately trying to get more money out of us, which is

understandable, given their fares are much more reasonable than Disney's. You certainly get what you pay for on a cruise.

□ Perhaps one of the biggest letdowns for us was the onboard entertainment. We knew it wouldn't be of the same quality of Disney, but a lot of the evening shows just didn't interest us at all. The only one that did, a Freddie Mercury impersonator, was standing-room-only by the time we got there, which was a real disappointment. Equally, a lot of the listings in Horizons, P&O's equivalent of a Navigator, didn't jump out at us, which was a great shame, particularly on our days at sea.

□ With the exception of the entertainment, I thought the Azura, and P&O, matched up surprisingly well to Disney's high standards. It was a much more pleasant experience that I expected it to be, and we're now thinking of another non-Disney cruise in a couple of year's time, as we'd like to explore the Baltic cities. Of course, we'd prefer to do it with Disney, so we'll watch with interest to see what their 2014 itinerary contains, but if that doesn't come through, cruising with another company won't concern us half as much in the future.

*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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