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**Review of the Carnival Freedom  
4/26/2008 14 Night Transatlantic Cruise  
Miami to Rome**

You know the old saying, "Time flies when you're having fun"? Well it also flies when you've been gone for almost 3 weeks and trying to catch up on work! I want to thank everybody for the warm welcomes I received when I returned home from my transatlantic cruise last month. It's so nice to feel missed! I also want to thank, Jean, my new assistant, for the amazing job she did keeping things rolling along in my absence. Considering I pretty much threw her to the wolves, she did a GREAT job!

Now, for what many of you have been waiting to hear about. How was it doing a 14 night transatlantic cruise with 9 sea days?? I must tell you it was awesome! I was prepared for cool (ok, crappy) weather and rough seas. I think it rained once or twice in the middle of the night but every single day from start to finish was sunny, warm and best of all...CALM! I have been on some pretty turbulent Caribbean sailings and this was honestly an extremely calm cruise as far as the seas go! I have to believe that this was the exception to the rule though and we just got extremely lucky so I truly feel grateful for my luck!

We left Miami, did two days at sea and then stopped in St. Maarten for the day. It was the tail end of their Carnival holiday and there was a big parade scheduled. We heard about it while we were on the beach and warned by the locals we best head back pretty early as they were going to close the streets. Luckily we did, we heard the traffic was horrible and we were delayed sailing by a couple hours due to a medical emergency. We still had a great time; after all, we were in St. Maarten, home of Orient Beach (wink wink).

It was an odd feeling as we sailed out of St. Maarten. I watched the land disappear and knew it would be 5 days before I would see it again. We quickly settled into a routine for our sea days. Sleeping late, basking in the sun followed by an afternoon nap on most days. We had late seating which I truly love more and more each time I do it. I can honestly say I enjoyed my evenings on the ship a lot even though there weren't many people to share it with. The average age on the cruise was probably 65+. My 40 something friends and I would joke that we should probably go sign up for Camp Carnival since there were only 25 kids on the entire ship. With an older crowd there was never a problem finding a deck chair to lay in by the pool but don't show up for Bingo late or you might not get a seat! Early dining had to be just jammed pack as ¾ of the tables in the late seating were empty every night. Our wait staff just had our table so our service was top notch! I am happy to report that I was able to keep my two pledges I made the first night at dinner; no bread and butter and no desserts! It was a standing joke at the table every night as the waiter looked at my hopefully thinking this might be the night I break down and order something! He even started tempting me and bringing me one anyway but I was strong and resisted!

So what was it like to do 5 sea days in a row? I had actually done 5 days in a row last year on the way from Honolulu to Vancouver after my Hawaii cruise. In contrast, our weather was cold and crappy on that cruise so the days did feel a little longer. I really enjoyed this cruise so much mostly because of the 5 sea days. We could really go out and enjoy the nightlife and the new friends we'd meet without feeling like you had to cut your evening short because the next day was a port day....or you weren't up to going out at all because you'd been in port all day and were tired. We typically stayed up until 2 or 3 closing down several

of the lounges and bars. The piano bar on board was great! Brad Alexander was the Piano Man and I had pleasure of cruising with him just a few months earlier on the Carnival Liberty. It was like walking in to Cheers the first night getting a warm welcome from him, "Uh oh...Pammy's in the house!" ☺ One of the highlights of this cruise though was that we got to see our favorite bartender, Elena, who was also on the Liberty! It was just like a big ol' reunion! Our group just fell in love with her last Fall and we were so excited to be able to cruise 14 days with her!!

There were a few times during the 5 days at sea that I would find myself thinking about my Geographic's, realizing that I was two days (or more) from land in any direction. It wasn't a big deal I guess, just something I found myself reflecting on. Apparently the ship was concerned about that as well and took extreme precautions to avoid any Norwalk outbreaks. There was a strong odor of bleach a lot so we knew they were in overtime mode for sanitation. Kudos to Carnival for putting the ships health #1!

What many thought would be 5 long days at sea ended up feeling like 5 short days. We arrived in Funchal Portugal before we knew it. We took the tram up to the top where we had a beautiful view of the city and coast. Now coming down was another story. You had a couple of options....the same way you came up OR....you could take the Sledge! The Sledge is a large wicker basket for two, sort of resembling Santa's sleigh only there aren't any reindeer and Rudolf isn't lighting your way. You sit in the basket as two men give you a push to get you started. They run behind you until you're going really fast and then they jump on the back of the skis and ride down with you. They use their body weight to "steer" you from crashing into the rock walls that line both side of the street and also prevent you from hitting any of the oncoming traffic. You cross through 4-way stops (did I mention this was a city street you come down?) only you don't stop! After your lungs have had a good clearing out you arrive at the bottom where you collect your things, put your heart back in your chest and then pay 25 EUR for a cab the rest of the way down! Ok so that last part was a rip off but not much you can do if you don't want to walk 3 miles downhill!

The night we left Portugal was very exciting, we were heading for Spain and that meant we would go thru the Straits of Gibraltar. Oh and Africa would be about ½ a mile off our Starboard side!!! I remember emailing a friend that night saying I could SEE AFRICA!! Her response was, "Just how much have you been drinking"? Apparently not many people knew we'd be going thru the Strait. We could see the lights along the coast but it was after midnight so there wasn't much to see. But hey, I can still say I saw Africa, despite the drinking! ☺

Next up was Malaga Spain. What a beautiful city! So clean and the architecture is just amazing! There was a shuttle bus to the pier exit where they had another bus to take you to the city. I believe the cost was about 7 EUR round trip, much more reasonable! Once in town we took a horse and buggy ride around, a new twist on a city tour. At the end we found a sidewalk café and enjoyed a lunch of Paella and Sangria. Personally they can keep the Paella but the Sangria was the bomb! Just one glass (large) is all one needs!

Our days were now numbered. One more sea day, one more port day. Our last sea day was our only day that wasn't picture perfect. It was cool and breezy but still warm enough for shorts. Many people began the ritual of packing as our last day on the ship was a full port day and some were even disembarking in Livorno instead of the following morning in Rome.

I had arranged for a private tour for about 20 of us. We all met on the promenade and waited for the ship to be cleared. When it was time we all went down to the gangway and found our bus and driver immediately

which was truly a feat because there were at least 50 buses waiting with probably 1000 people (did I mention we were cruising again with the Legendary Journey's group?? ☺) We boarded the bus and were whisked away, the first bus to exit the pier! Woo hoo! We would beat them all to Pisa for sure! It was about a 30 minute drive or so to Pisa. We were taken to a parking lot area where we were told it was a few minute walk to the Leaning Tower (of Pisa of course!). Don't believe them, it would've easily been 20+ minutes. There were trolleys there that you could pay to ride. I worked a deal with him and hired one just for our group at the cost of 60 EUR which worked out to 3 EUR pp round trip. I thought that was reasonable. We spent only 30 minutes walking around the grounds of the tower. Cool architecture for sure but very "Flea market" like as well.

Back on the bus we headed for the highlight of our port stops; Florence, Italy! I was completely in love with Italy after my first Med cruise last year and was really looking forward to Florence. We were dropped off at the train station as the streets there were too narrow for any type of large bus. We were told it was only about a 15 minute walk to the Accademia museum where we would see Michelangelo's David. It was really more like 30 minutes when you're traveling in a larger group. We had our tour provider pre-reserve our tickets which cost an extra 4 EUR but it was so worth it. The line was at least an hour and a half long and we were in within 10 minutes with our reserved tickets! It's the only way to go. The David was right inside, no big build up or walking for hours to find it, it was just right there. What they say is true, he really does look like he could actually be breathing!

After the museum we grabbed a Gelato and roamed around a bit before grabbing a pizza for lunch. After all, we were in Italy! We saw the Cathedral which was breathtaking. Afterwards we decided to save time, we would grab a cab and ask him to drive us around so we'd be sure and see most of the city sites. This ride was much like the Sledge ride, fast and scary. I suggest walking for the faint of heart! All in all, it was a great day and everybody was smiling ear to ear on the bus ride back to Livorno. It was bittersweet as we knew that night we would have to say goodbye to all our friends; both old and new. Spending 14 days with the same people seems so much harder to say goodbye, it was a somber evening for me.

The next morning we debarked the ship but not without one final incident. There were several things that happened on this sailing that I have never heard of before. There was the woman who was upset she couldn't go to the past guest party because she wasn't a past guest. So she punched the purser in the face. Then there were the two older gentlemen who were having a love triangle over a single older lady at their dinner table. One man got upset and jumped up and put the other man in a headlock. The other man retaliated by stabbing his attacker in the arm with a fork. I heard they would be put off the ship in Portugal but then later heard they patched things up and all 3 returned to the same dinner table! Apparently there were some pretty feisty seniors on this cruise!! Now back to the last morning. We were doing self-assist to get off the ship so we waited patiently for an empty elevator so the three of us could all fit in it with our luggage. We went down one floor and the doors opened and about 4 more people decided they could fit too. After the doors closed the two other gentlemen that had boarded started having a chest bumping match. Their wives begged them to stop it but it continued until I thought there might be punches thrown and I certainly didn't want an elbow in my teeth. I finally just yelled for them to grow up and act their age (somewhere about 75 I'm guessing). As I said, there were some feisty seniors on this cruise! (ha ha ha)

We arrived at the Rome airport several hours early but by the end of the day we landed in Merry ol' London England! We had prearranged a cab service to pick us up and they were right there waiting for us. It was about a 45 min to an hour ride to our hotel but that was nice as it gave us a chance to see the city a

bit. After checking in we were told the pub down the street had good food so it was off to the Camel for dinner. We had some of the best fish and chips I've ever had! Great food and super nice staff.

The following day we had a private guide for London. We hired Harry of Harry's tours.

<http://www.cruising-america.com/londontours/index.html> He picked us up about 9am and our tour lasted until 4pm. I don't think there's much about London that he doesn't know and won't show you! It was just an amazing day, way too much to even tell you about or this would be 10 pages long! You just have to go see London, it's really a fascinating city and I will definitely be going back some day as there's much more to see!

Two days in London flew by and it was time for us to fly as well. It was on to Dublin, Ireland! By now we were all pretty ragged and tired. We were 17 days into our trip and I had unfortunately taken a horrible cough with me off the ship and it was in full gear by the time we reached Dublin. We strolled thru Temple Bar the first night before stopping for dinner. I must say I was really looking forward to some corned beef and cabbage but good luck finding that! I had more fish and chips and it was not that great. In fact, over all, I was extremely disappointed with the food in general in Dublin. The beer, however, was a different story! Of course our first stop of our full day tour was the Guinness Brewery. We pretty much flew thru the self-guided tour up 12 floors to the Gravity Bar where I was poured my very first (and last) Guinness! For those of you that know me, you know I don't just NOT like beer, I pretty much despise it. But I was determined to try a Guinness as I heard it's so much better in Dublin. Ok so it wasn't bad, I managed a few sips without gagging but I certainly don't think I could've or would've finished the pint but that's ok, I can say I tried it! We grabbed a few souvenirs and then back to our car. We flagged down a cab first thing in the morning and just asked him how much for the whole day. He quoted us 220 EUR which we figured would be reasonable since we'd split it 3 ways. He was born and raised in Dublin and took us out into the countryside, to the coast and showed us one of 3 waterfalls in Ireland. It was a super fun day! He felt like one of the gang by the end of the day and offered to pick us up in the morning and take us to the airport, which he did.

I was up at 5am to get dressed and ready for the 9am flight. 4 flights later I landed in my home town approximately 24 hours after leaving Dublin. Needless to say, I was a bit tired and felt like roadkill. It was about midnight CST when I climbed into my bed. You can't even imagine how great it felt to finally be back in my own bed! It's wonderful to travel but the more I do it the more I enjoy coming home!!

So that brings me to the next question I get most often, besides how was my trip (aren't you sorry you asked now 4 pages ago??) The next question is....When is my next cruise! Well you might be surprised to know that I am landlocked now until October when I sail on the Liberty of the Seas with my dear friend for his birthday. Of course there's always the chance for a last minute cruise.....right???