



Caroline Preston, age 19

A VOYAGE OF RE-DISCOVERY

By Caroline Preston, www.thejarvisjotter.co.uk

I recall my first voyage at sea, a ferry crossing enroute to a family holiday to Spain, hardly glamorous but exciting to a seven-year-old non the less.

Fast-forward to 1998, I'm a naïve 19-year-old and I'm waving goodbye to my worried parents as I head for life on the ocean waves as a cruise ship crew member. I still remember that day vividly, looking in awe at this giant gleaming white ship, Italian by design and notably stylish, and about to become my home for the next 6 months.

I'd joined MS Seawing part of the Airtours Sun Cruises fleet, small really by today's standards, just 800 passengers but thrilling for me and the start of a seafaring career and lifelong love affair for travel. These days sadly I'm more of a 'landlubber' but I still reminisce about those heady days at sea, the fun and frolics that came with being part of a floating family. What happens at sea stays at sea...they say.

The facts remain, having grown exponentially the cruise industry is booming and a whopping 30 million* of us will have cruised by the close of 2019. Now a mainstream holiday choice for many I decided it was high time checked out cruising as a passenger.

Searching for the perfect cruise was a task in itself, so many deals, fares, itineraries I certainly clocked up the internet hours. Eventually we chose a 10-night Southern Caribbean cruise with Princess Cruises, we actually booked cruise only and booked our own flights, just for kicks we hired a Ford Mustang Convertible for a pre-cruise stay we'd spend touring sunny boulevards. Princess's marketing tag line incidentally is 'come back new' certainly appealing, time to test it out!

Embarkation was a slick and impressive 10 minutes as we stepped into Crown Princess's magnificent atrium a live steel band switched us immediately into 'tropical mode'. Our cabin, cosy but comfortable featured the 'Princess Luxury Bed' and picture window for some necessary daylight. The in-cabin entertainment featured a Netflix style TV system which allows you to order pizza or extra pillows via the TV. So far, it's all good.

Although pricey we purchased the premium drinks package, this meant for me a no cocktail restriction... but it's worth checking what packages are available with your cruise as some lines offer similar packages as incentives.

As we waved goodbye to Fort Lauderdale, we soaked up the atmosphere of the sail-away party, a vibrant party of singing, dancing and music. Excitement built as our next stops would be Princess Cays, (Bahamas), St Thomas (USVI), St Kitts, St Lucia, Barbados then Antigua with a few sea days in between.

It's impossible to be bored here, day and night there's a packed schedule of entertainment from full-size theatre productions to deck parties, comedians, quiz shows and musicians of all genres the choice is vast but pleasantly you could also choose to avoid it all.

Stopping at each island we bathed on pristine white beaches, explored luscious green landscapes, snorkelled colourful reefs and even made our own chocolate high in the Piton Mountains of St Lucia. For independent travellers it's totally possible to do your own thing in port just make sure your plan gets you back to the ship on time! For the not so independent a full selection of Princess Tours are available.

As each exotic day passed, we'd dine. The ship's two restaurants, buffet and snack dining are all included with the Crown Grill, Crab Shack, British Pub and Italian dining options costing extra. We did the Crown Grill, a 22oz Porterhouse and Lobster tail... what a steakhouse! (\$29pp). Despite this I actually found the included restaurants to be just as good, indulging on hand dived scallops, beef wellington, cheddar souffle...the list goes on, we were spoilt rotten by our fabulous waiter Ramil, we miss him. If you prefer something less formal pizza under the stars is also totally an option.

Incidentally there were two formal nights on this cruise, gowns and tuxedos all round but if this isn't your thing it's absolutely avoidable. Most nights after dinner we'd head to the 'Good Spirits' bar where our favourite Mixologist Felipe would demonstrate mixing cocktails. This was a great place to chill and meet fellow passengers.

Summing it all up this cruise experience was luxurious, relaxing, exciting and fun in one package, so much so part of me really wanted to stay...I'm not saying it's the case on every single ship, but Princess is a well-oiled machine with the formula right and I did in fact 'come back new'.

Caroline travelled on Crown Princess in November 2019 www.princess.com/ships-and-experience/ships/kp-crown-princess with pre-cruise stay in Lauderdale by the Sea, Florida www.plungebeachhotel.com

Caroline booked with British Airways www.ba.com from Newcastle via London Heathrow to Miami with a Ford Mustang rental car provided by Avis www.avis.com at Miami Airport. *cruising.org

