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Trip Report Mediterranean Cruise MSC Splendida

Background. We were interested in a Mediterranean cruise and began looking. I found a cruise tour organized by Online Vacation Center that was a great deal. It covered roundtrip *airfare on Alitalia between JFK and Rome, 2 nights at a 5 star hotel in Rome, an 11 day cruise on the MSC Splendida out of Naples (Italian cruise line), and bus transfers.* The cruise itinerary was Naples, Genoa, Athens, Katakolon (Greece), Rhodes, Alexandria (Egypt), Crete, Malta, Messina (Sicily), and back to Naples. The total fare for both of us was \$4,485 and we jumped on it. There would be 18 of us on the trip.

Tuesday, January 26, 2010. Drove to Salt Lake to overnight at the Radisson Airport, and leave the car for free.

Wednesday, January 27, 2010. Seemed like a long flight from SLC to JFK. Very easy to get to our hotel, a couple of miles from JFK about 7pm via a taxi. Ordered a pizza in as no restaurant nearby.

Security at SLC and JFK was a breeze.

Thursday, January 28, 2010. Spent most of the day at JFK waiting on our Alitalia flight at 9:55pm. The terminal was nice and not hectic. An Aeroflot flight was at the gate next to us for a flight to Moscow. The place was full of Russians. I went to the duty-free shop to buy a bottle of vodka for our stay in Rome. Russians were stocking up on American Jack Daniels bourbon to take home with them. Here I am buying Russian vodka.

The seats on the plane to Rome were very hard. The plane was not full, so we had room to squirm around in. We were around a NY

Italian American soccer team. They were quite noisy for a while. We were met by our tour escort at baggage claim. Then sailed through customs to our motor coach. One lady's luggage was lost (she never ever got it).

Met an interesting couple from Las Vegas on the bus. He (Don) was a Russian linguist in the Army Security Agency (like the Air Force Security Service that I was in), a retired LVPD captain, and later head of the Nevada DMV, and now retired. He liked his vodka. We have a few things in common. She is a retired Las Vegas teacher.

It was an hour ride in heavy traffic to our hotel on the outskirts of Rome.

Our hotel, the H10, is in suburbs of Rome and is new and modern. Ice machines were listed as a hotel amenity. I went looking for ice for our evening drink, and couldn't find anything. Finally saw a small door on the wall in the hallway. Opened it and saw an ice tray with enough ice for one drink!

Friday, January 29, 2010.

We had the day on our own, so We rode the city bus into the city center (1 euro each). Then got on a hop on hop off bus (19 euros each) for the rest of the day.

Had a nice lunch at an old trattoria, and it was expensive.

That evening we walked in the rain to a local restaurant with our new friends from Las Vegas. The help did not speak English. An elderly patron (a former waiter) jumped up and took over. We were interested in the locals, and they were interested in us. We had some great pasta and wine.

Saturday, January 30, 2010. It was a nice 3 hour coach ride from Rome to Naples. It was a scenic and and enjoyable 3 hours, in the rain.

Only about 50 cruise passengers boarded in Naples, so it was easy and relaxed. They lost my bag, however. After much ado it showed up later. It had been delivered to cabin 10156 instead of 10056.

We had selected early dining, which was supposed to be at 7:30pm. When we boarded they told us early dining is now 6pm, which did not make us happy. Showed up at 6pm and was able to trade with another couple from our group for the second sitting at 8:30pm.

We are bound for Genoa, Italy this evening.

Sunday, January 31, 2010. The trip up from Naples was very rough and we docked two hours late. We took dramamine and survived ok.

We are departing Genoa this evening. The majority of passengers debarked today and 3,000 new boarded. The passenger capacity is 3,274, so it is a large ship and larger than we like. It was hectic getting off and on. We did not do much in Genoa other than walk on the pier. We got a much needed nap later.

Can only say the food is ok. Nothing to brag about. Only about 100 Americans on board when we boarded. Language is no problem. It certainly is not as entertaining and fun as it was on our other cruises. The Lido deck buffet is always chaotic. Europeans (not the British, but especially *Italians*) *don't understand lines and taking turns. They barge to the front.*

P. S. Garry. I got that Flip camera at Costco you told us about. It is really slick and does a good job. I brought the camcorder for backup.

Did not get this off yesterday, as I could not get connected. Finally got connected this morning, and got Julie's message. Then could not find this file to send it. So, will try again later.

LaRue went to cash a travelers check for Euros. We signed up for a tour in Katakolon, Greece, tomorrow to tour Olympia (the site of the 1st Olympics), and a museum tour. Our friends from Las Vegas are going also. We had breakfast with them at the hotel this morning.

Could not get connected to the internet again due to connection problems. The 30 minutes that I purchased expired just as I was ready to send this. So, I gave up. According to our dinner mates the people using the internet café were not successful either.

Monday, February 1, 2010. All day at sea. Passed through the straits between Italy and Sicily, which is only a mile or so wide. Very spectacular. The Captain hosted a social hour in all bars on decks 5,6 and 7 from 5:15 to 6:15pm as we passed through the straits.

The sea was rough during the night with lots of wind and rain.

Had our first formal night in the dining room. Just a normal dinner with nothing entertaining, but us. We are at a table now with a couple from our tour group and a lady from England. She talks so low that nobody can hear her.

Tuesday, February 2, 2010. Katakolon, Greece. Went on a 4 hour guided tour of Olympia. It is the site of the 1st Olympics dating back to 20th century B.C. Walked in the stadium and viewed the pillars and ruins as well as a museum of artifacts. Well worth the price.

Departure was delayed about an hour due to high winds. After backing up, the ship had to rotate around. The wind caught us, bashed the ship into the pier, and blew us toward the shore. The side thrusters did not have enough thrust. It was finally overcome, and we took off.

Wednesday, February 3, 2010. Port of Piraeus and Athens. Nice 4 hour bus tour of the city highlights. We stopped at a marina where we paid about \$12 for two cups of coffee and two very small cookies. The British couple we sat with were not happy and insisted on a 10 per cent tip instead of the automatic 15. Stopped at the site of the Olympic stadium built in 1896 and seats 77,000. After the Olympic torch is lit in Olympia it is brought here for further ceremony before it goes on to wherever the next Olympics is held.

Back to the ship we had lunch with an Australian couple and a British couple, which was very enjoyable. We went back to our cabin and

looking out towards the City of Athens I could see the Parthenon on the hill, which is the highest point in the city.

Thursday, February 4, 2010. Island of Rhodes (or Roda in greek) Greece. Skipped the tours and got off at our leisure. Rented a Mercedes Taxi for 80 euros (about \$130). A nice driver toured us around the highlights for two hours. Visited a Greek Orthodox church which was fantastic. Area is known for tourism, sunshine, jewelry, rugs, and fur coat manufacturing. Looked at a short mink coat for \$6.000. LaRue bought gold earrings in a nice shop. Had to be back on the ship by 1:30 for departure at 2pm.

The first inhabitants of Rhodes date back to 6000 BC!

The coastline of Turkey was east of us 12 miles. It was interesting to me since I spent 1958 in Turkey. On departure we are sailing south along the coastline of Turkey, and then by a small section of Iran to Egypt in the morning.

Friday, February 5, 2010. Alexandria, Egypt. Quite a day in Alexandria and Cairo, Egypt. We were off the ship for our excursion by 8 am and returned at 8:30 pm. We had 32 coaches going to 3 different tours to Cairo and the pyramids. A total of 59 departing on tours. Very well run operation. We were the 8th coach to leave as we were on the longest tour. Had light rain as we departed and on our return. Our guide said it only rains briefly about 6 times a year, and it is the coldest winter ever. The temp was about 40 when we left. Alexandria has 6 million people and Cairo 23 million.

We traveled 3 hours to Cairo on the Desert Road. Then visited 3 different pyramid sites on the outskirts of Gaza. Saw the Giza pyramids, Sakkara (the oldest) pyramid, the Memphis pyramids, the Ramses II statue, and the Sphynx. Very spectacular.

The vendors and camel drivers were relentless. They didn't know they were up against professionals, and at a disadvantage (we thought). We did really well on a couple of small souvenir items. Stopped for lunch at a 5 star Moevenpick hotel for a very nice buffet

lunch. It was included in our ticket (no camel or mutton that I know of).

Egypt is really an eye opener for litter and poor living conditions. It makes Mexico look first class. We traveled along a canal on the outskirts of Cairo seeing small old shops. There was garbage of every kind on both sides dumped on the banks. It was awful. We saw a dead goat in the canal and people fishing beside it. Plastic bottles and debris so thick you could walk across. The Germans and English were appalled. This was only about a mile from the 5 star hotels near the pyramids.

After we got back on board the Captain announced that our departure would be delayed due to wind conditions,

Saturday, February 6, 2010. Woke up this morning (9 am !!). We were still in Alexandria as the port was closed. We finally departed about 10 am for a well appreciated day at sea. The Captain announced that we would still make the next stop in Crete as planned. We are now down to our last 4 days.

Had breakfast this morning with a very nice couple from near London that we had lunch with once before. We were the last ones in the dining room and decided we had better leave.

The Mediterranean cuisine is getting a bit tiresome at this point. Trying different things. Most evenings they have regional entrees. (some good, some not so good). As I said before language is no problem at all. The staff is incredible and seats you with English speaking people. The tours are organized with English speaking people that usually include Germans, Asians, etc. It was announced that people from 70 different countries are on board. Americans are the smallest group, so we do not stand out. And now the rest of the world dress about the way we do.

Sunday, February 7, 2010, Island of Crete. Docked in Crete on time. Almost missed our tour as we mis-understood and moved our time back 1 hour instead of tonight. Looked out and saw the buses

boarding, so we really had to hurry. Crete is really nice, and so far may be my favorite. Lots of olive trees, goats, high mountains, and quaint villages. Short time in Crete as we had to be onboard for departure at 2pm. Crete has 600,000 people. Also learned that olive trees live 1000 years. Our guide pointed out a former U.S. "espionage site" which is now closed under the Clinton administration. It is where several of my friends did tours with the Air Force Security Service. It was one of their best tours beside Scotland.

Dinner menu had large shrimp on the menu which we jumped on. They were whole shrimp and looked beautiful. The texture and taste was horrible. LaRue sent hers back for something else. It was the only night steak was on the menu, and I missed it. After the shrimp I did not want anything else. Our friend Don said he had to leave the dining room the shrimp were so revolting. He also said he has gone down 2 belt sizes on the cruise.

Monday, February 8, 2010. Sailing along on the Mediterranean this morning. Do not get to Malta until 3pm, and then we have a tour booked. After getting up I read last night's cruise letter and saw the Super Bowl was on TV in the Sports Bar from 1-3am. Oh well, probably would not have stayed up anyway. Got the score on CNN this morning. Even skipped the entertainment last night as sleep was calling.

The sea was really rough yesterday and last night, with high winds. I took a Dramamine and that made me sleep until room service arrived at 7:30am.

Finally arrived in La Valletta, Malta about 2 hours late. Got off the ship at 5pm for our 4 hour tour that ended up in the dark. Very nice place to visit. Very British who gave it back in 1964. The island is small with no mountains, no rivers, and hardly any rain. They use desalination plants to get water. The tour guide said Malta was more heavily bombed in WWII than London. The port was heavily fortified with rock walls, moats, etc. It did not seem to keep them from being

taken over by nearly everybody. Even the Arabs took over for a while, and named one little city, Rabat.

Tuesday, February 9, 2010, Island of Sicily. Arrived in Messina, Sicily at 8 am. Had a nice 4 hour tour of the area and the Basilica Cathedral. Had a light rain. Very mountainous and located on the strait with the mainland of Italy just 2 miles across to the North. This is the strait we sailed through on the start of the cruise. Packing up for debarking in the morning in Naples (Napoli).

Wednesday, February, 10, 2010. Naples, Italy. Debarked and boarded our tour bus for the 3 hour ride to the Rome airport. Pleasant ride through rolling hills and mountains with rain falling. Patton passed through the mountains here heading north. You can still see shelled out remains of old stone farm houses that remain abandoned.

Had a 4 hour delay in Rome because of the bad snow storm in New York. Finally the long 10 hour flight to JFK. Landed hard in a whiteout and taxied for 40 minutes trying to get to the terminal. The airport closed down. Luckily, we had a room reservation nearby, and the courtesy transportation was able to make it to the airport. Arrived at our hotel around midnight and called Delta. All flights cancelled indefinitely. We were told that we were confirmed for Sunday, February 14.

Looked like a long 4 days to kill. Ventured out to JFK Thursday morning as the snow had stopped. Wanted to talk to someone in person. Lines were everywhere and out the door. I spotted a 1st class line with nobody in it. I approached the agent who said, "this is a 1st class line". I replied, "yes I know, but all I want is a quick yes or no on my Sunday flight". She reluctantly agreed to check. She then got nice. After much looking she called in a supervisor. She remarked, "we really try to take care of our million milers". She told us to look really upset for the supervisor. We kept on being nice. The supervisor got us on one of the first planes out at 6pm! Had to

forfeit the nights rent on the hotel room, but that was ok with us.
Thank you Delta.

Arrived late in SLC where we had a reservation at the Ramada Airport, and where the car was parked. Lucked out and they gave us a two-room suite for our \$55 reservation. Life is good.

The end