

Rev 12/1/2023

**Celebrity Reflection
East Carribbean Cruise
7 days - January 23 - January 30, 2016 Miami,
Florida Roundtrip**

This is a continuation of our trip to Dublin, Ireland, Southampton, England, and the Queen Mary crossing.

Thursday, January 21.

We mailed a box of dirty clothes, and winter clothes, home. It weighed 22 pounds, and the postage was \$59! Kind of a surprise, but worth it to lighten our load for the rest of the trip.

The Florida Keys are very interesting. A bunch of small islands stretching 100 miles connected with fill and bridges, the longest being the 7 Mile Bridge. It is just before you get to Key West, the end of the chain. Did not expect all of the development in Key West. It was difficult to get around with all of the traffic, narrow streets in old town, pedestrians, bicycles, and scooters darting around everywhere. Did not stay long and headed back north in solid traffic both directions. Can not imagine what this area is like on the weekends.

On the way north we stopped at the Conch Café in Marathon for lunch, where most everything has conch in it. LaRue had the chowder which she said was excellent. The taste I had was excellent. I went for the chef salad to play it safe. Got to our hotel in Florida City about 4pm and glad to hang it up for the day. Really nice Quality Inn for one third what we paid the night before in Marathon, just 50 miles south. Decided more driving for the day, and walked one block to Dennys for dinner.

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Friday, January 22.

Raining hard this morning, but it is warm. Kind of puts a damper on going to the Everglades. We are at the jump off point, so will go for it, since we are here. On the way we saw road signs with warnings to watch for panthers and alligators crossing the road. That gets your attention.

Stopped at the visitor center on the way in and watched a movie on the Everglades. It started raining harder than we have ever seen it. A park ranger said this is our dry season, and not supposed to happen. We learned that the Everglades is not a swamp as most people think, but a moving river, and ecosystem.

This is the only place in the world where crocs and alligators coexist. Any terrain that is a couple of feet in elevation above water is home to a grove of trees. Got back in the car and continued on to the end of the road, which is about another 40 miles. Went through a pass that was 3 feet in elevation. Not a whole lot to see unless you get out on the trails and walk.

Got back to US 1 and turned north to Miami, and the airport area about 40 miles away. Not a fun trip as it was raining hard with bad visibility. Eight lanes each direction, and Friday afternoon traffic. The south bound lanes were creeping along. Going north we were rolling about 70 until a big wreck slowed everything, which was sort of a relief. Got going again following the GPS, then it showed 4 lanes going left to the airport, and 4 lanes going right for the airport. All I could do is stay right, which took us off the toll road to the surface roads to the airport. Not a place you want to be.

We eventually got to our hotel, and what a relief that was. Got checked in and decided to turn in the car. Got that done, and their van took us to the rental car center. It is a huge terminal where you catch a train to the airline terminals and where the hotel shuttles stop. We called our hotel, and they eventually came around and picked us up. What a relief to get that all done, and sit back and unwind.

The hotel does not have a restaurant. I scouted around and saw a little latin place across the street. It looked rather sketchy. I went in, and it was not bad. We ventured in for dinner. It was locals with family. The food was Honduran, but I saw a Cuban sandwich that I just had to have. But, "no senior, no Cubana sandwich tonight". So, I had hot spicy shrimp with rice. LaRue had Honduran pork chops with onions. My shrimp was wonderful in a nice sauce with onions, and bell peppers. LaRue liked her pork. It was really a treat.

Saturday, January 23.

Nice sunny day today. The hotel provides free transportation to the cruise ships. What an experience that was. About 50 people going to four different cruise ships. It was a huge party bus with loud music and strobe lights. The seats were on each side of the bus facing the center. The driver announced, "your on vacation - it's party time". A few people elected to dance in the center aisle.

We got to the ship around 11am expecting to sit around for 2 or 3 hours. We went straight through, and was on the ship by 11:30 having lunch. The ship looks new and is ultra modern. The buffet was fantastic with lots of food stations, and about every cuisine you would want. Very impressive. However, being our 1st time on Celebrity we don't quite know what to do. The cabin is bright and airy with adequate room, and a fairly long couch.

Getting ready for the life boat drill, and shoving off, so will get this sent. Internet looks really expensive on this ship so will not be on the internet much.

This is an entirely different cruise experience for us, and just trying to take it all in. The ship is only 2 years old and is the newest and largest in the Celebrity fleet. It has 16 decks, and appears larger than the QM2. It is smaller at 126,000 tons and 1,063 feet compared to the QM2 at 151,400 tons at 1,143 feet. About 600 more passengers on this ship.

Lots of bars and specialty restaurants that are extra charge. It seems to be the strategy to upsell. The gratuity is 18% compared to 15% that we have seen on other cruise lines. Prices per drink seem to be about \$2-3 more than the other cruise lines. The clientele is mostly working couples off for a week holiday, and partying. They really don't care what you think. There is also a big contingent of retirees.

When we booked we had the choice of one of several perks, and elected to take the standard beverage package. Looks like most of the passengers opted for it also, as the bars were packed. We went to the Martini bar and saw a couple so crooked at 6:30pm they could barely walk. It was also difficult to get service as the bar tenders were going non-stop. We left and went to a quiet little bar in the casino (the casino is huge and 2 to 3 times larger than we have seen on other ships).

There is no formal nights on Celebrity. They have two nights designated as dress up, with the evening dress code "smart casual" or "smart chic". Smart chic is defined as anything, as long as you look and feel chic. We did not know what to wear the first night. Went smart casual and were overdressed. Being the first evening most people were in jeans, t-shirts, and a variety of garb including shorts, which is not supposed to be acceptable in the evenings.

Dinner in the dining room was a different experience. We have anytime dining, which required getting in line, obtaining a pager, and waiting. This was a big come down from our own table available anytime on the last cruise. The dining room is huge, and all decorated in white, chrome, glass, and stainless steel, so is rather stark looking. Was put at a table for two and the menu looked quite good with 4 or 5 options for the main course - most of which was good American comfort food. I went for the shrimp cocktail (again - my duty), prime rib, and apple pie a la mode. LaRue had beet salad (strange stuff), prime rib, and crème brulee (again - her duty). It was good old American beef, cooked perfectly medium rare, and was excellent. However, it came with only about a teaspoon of mashed potatoes, and a few string beans. Our waiter made a grand entry splash, and took our order. We never saw him again until the dessert round. Servers brought the stuff out.

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The menu had a quote as follows: "Burgundy - makes you think silly things. Bordeaux - makes you talk about them. Champagne - makes you do them". by Brillat Savarin. Wine by the glass was on the menu, and a wine server took our order. Found out the Kendal Jackson featured on the menu was above the threshold of \$9 per glass of our beverage package. They could upgrade us to the Premium package for only \$30 more per person per day! Of course they could - but we opted for a very good Wente Cabernet that fit within our package, at \$9 per glass. It was fine and better than we drink at home. After dinner we went to the late show which was an American comedian that was very funny and very good.

Sunday, January 24.

Nice and partly cloudy. Then partly sunny with moderate seas. Walked early on deck 15, which has a short jogging track midships. It is open around the front and back of the ship for walking. Hardly anybody out. Crazy in that the back third of the ship has grassy areas that you can walk or lay on, but no chairs. It is real grass, and I plucked some to find out. Noticed the ship does not have a water slide, a basketball court, or golf putting range. Guess it is not for the sporting crowd. It does have all kinds of lounging areas with all kinds of lounge chairs, big beds, hammocks, and wind break secluded areas for hiding out.

We had morning coffee on our patio. It came in paper cups, which is sort of tacky. It was an enjoyable 80 degrees F outside. Saw the Bahamas passing by on our starboard side. Went to the main dining room for breakfast and shared a table with two Florida retiree couples. They were with a group of 70 from their retirement community. One couple was from Cape Cod originally, and the other couple from Illinois. Our waiter with no expression at all took our orders. I could see no recognition that he understood or was hearing us. When the stuff arrived it was apparent that he didn't. I had eggs benedict (my required duty) which was ok. LaRue had a variety of things. She said her scrambled eggs were not good. I have reported on scrambled eggs several times on other cruises as being bad. I think the reason is cruise ships seem to

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use some sort of flavored powdered eggs. Anyway, they are always yucky. Don't go there.

Had a decent lunch in the dining room then went to the theater for a talk by a renowned shark scientist on his work at a Florida shark research facility. They put transmitters on sharks and plot their travel. The findings are incredible. He told of one old white shark they have tracked halfway across the Atlantic and back, and up and down the east coast just off the beaches. It is currently in the area we are now sailing across to Puerto Rico. Back to the cabin to catch the football playoffs starting at 3pm. Hated to root for Denver, but I did.

Went to the dining room for dinner and got our pager. Then went to the Passport Lounge while we waited for the pager to go off. We sat at the bar and Larue ordered a dry, dry, dry, dry. and not only dry. but very dry martini. The bartender just grinned and put the vermouth bottle by the shaker, so that it touched. He then raised his arm up with his elbow horizontal, and placed the stemmed glass on the crook of his elbow. He poured the contents of the shaker into it. Now, what is he going to do with it sitting on his elbow? He then dropped his arm to his side, and caught the martini in the stemmed glass with his other hand as it dropped. Quite a production and had everyone at the bar watching.

We ended up at a table for two. Larue had a salad, Colorado rack of lamb and sorbet for dessert. I did not see much I wanted on the menu so settled on French onion soup, shrimp scampi, and a scoop of chocolate ice cream for dessert. I have never eaten so much shrimp in my life as I have on this trip. LaRue said the lamb was excellent, and one of the best. The wine server remembered us from the night before when we ordered the Wente Cabernet. She poured it and left the bottle this time.

After dinner we were late getting to the 8pm start of the evening entertainment, and it was standing room only. The show was a production put on by the ships singers and dancers. Pretty boring as all they were doing was singing loud. Since we could not sit down we left after a while.

Monday, January 25.

Scheduled to arrive in San Juan, Puerto Rico at 3:30pm. Got up to go walking early, and it was raining too hard to walk outside. Found a fair route on deck 14 indoors past the pools and hot tubs. Then into the forward Observation Lounge, and back around. The Observation Lounge will be on our route this evening, as we don't leave San Juan until 11pm. The view should be great.

We went to the main dining room for breakfast, and ended up at a table for 8 with a couple from Las Vegas, a couple from Denmark, and a couple from Amarillo, Texas. The Texas guy was wearing a faded hoody sweat shirt, and a ball cap with sun glasses wrapped around. He was a friendly outgoing guy probably in his early 50's. We got into a discussion on oil prices, and he was full of all kinds of information and statistics. I figured him to be an oil field worker, and asked him if he is associated with the oil industry. He said "no, it is just for investment purposes" and that he is a foot and ankle surgeon! Very interesting couple and have traveled all over the world. He was recently hunting in Argentina for birds. He had such interesting tidbits that I just have to pass them on.

We got to talking about raising kids, and he told us about their teen age daughter, and a guy she had been going with. When they met he was showing her where his grandfather's ranch was located, and it was next to Mark Cuban's ranch. The boyfriend's grandfather is T. Boone Pickens. The daughter broke it off, even though he was a great guy, as material things do not impress her. He went on to explain that his daughter has access to everything, one of which his Ferrari. His wife bought it for him at a charity auction they were attending. So, we went on talking about fancy cars. He told a story about a local doctor that likes fine cars, and bought an Italian Bugatti, one of the highest priced cars available. He had a flat tire, and nobody in Amarillo could do anything for him. It required a Ferrari mechanic to be flown in from Las Vegas to get the wheel off. Then it had to be shipped to Italy. When the wheel and tire got back the

mechanic had to fly in again from Las Vegas to install it. The whole flat tire episode cost around \$20,000.

Another story was the police chief and sheriff responded to a robbery next door and spotted the Ferrari in his driveway. They wanted to know who it belonged to. He said it was his, and would they like to look it over, and maybe take it for a drive. So, the police chief and the sheriff take it for a drive that he expected would be 5 or 10 minutes. They were gone for 45 minutes. They returned with big grins, and said, "that car will never get a ticket in our jurisdiction". So far it hasn't. However, the downside is a gun belt scratched the driver's side seat. The seat had to be replaced with a Ferrari factory seat for \$12,000. Larue said, "well that is just two feet" and he laughed and concurred.

The Las Vegas guy works in the TJ Maxx distribution center. He told us how they buy during the off season, store it, and bring it out when the time is right. We talked for over an hour after breakfast was over, and finally had to clear out. You meet a lot of interesting people and hear some interesting things on cruise ships.

After breakfast we went to a talk on "Sensational Trials of the Last 25 Years" by a Salt Lake attorney named John Hansen. Kind of interesting. His next talk will be on the OJ Simpson trial. The next one after that will be a trial, and the audience will be the jury.

Since we arrived in San Juan late, and the tours would operate mostly after dark we did not schedule any. The pier is downtown so we just got off and walked around taking in the city life.

Went to the Observation Lounge for a before dinner drink, but it was closed for a special occasion (which irked us), so went to the Passport Lounge. Went to pick up our pager for dinner, and we went right in. Had dinner a little earlier than we planned. Finally got a personable waiter that was willing to visit and have a little fun. LaRue told him to send the "wine guy" by our table, and he got tickled with the terminology. He came back later, and said he could not find a "wine guy", so he would be our "wine

guy". He treated us very well. LaRue had escargot, pork loin, and something other than crème brulee for dessert. I had minestrone soup, and finally picked the baked chicken on a bed of smashed parsnips, as none of the other options appealed to me. Had lemon sorbet for dessert. Went to the late show and suffered through a mediocre illusionist.

Tuesday, January 26.

Decent looking day and smooth seas. Scheduled to dock in Phillipsburg, Sint Maarten (the Dutch section) at 9am. The other half is French, and is Saint-Martin. Got a quick walk in as we meet at 9:30 for a tour.

We went to the buffet for a quick breakfast. The handling for tours was not well organized, and a bit confusing. We ended up with our little group to take a tour of the island, and visit a butterfly farm. The butterfly farm was really fascinating. We were led through the complete life cycle, with all the while different species of butterflies fluttering around us.

Humorous tour guide/driver in one of those little island busses for 17 of us. The last stop before returning to the ship was for 45 minutes. We found a nice place to have a local beer. Then decided to have fish and chips thinking it would come out fast, as only one other couple in the place. Things don't move fast in the Caribbean. Had to pay our bill, and leave without getting the food, or get left behind. No problem though as there was plenty of food to be had when we got back to the ship. We just missed out on the local flavors.

This is an interesting and pretty place to visit with the two contrasting cultures of Dutch and French on a small island. While the island is lush green it also has an arid look to it with cactus and blue agave growing on it. It has some steep hills which go up to 1,200 feet. The only industry today is tourism, but the harvesting of salt provided for its early development. Our tour guide said "the only thing produced on the island now is babies".

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Got back to the ship and had some lunch in the buffet and regrouped. The ship was in a party mood in the evening. The bars were packed (they have a lot of them) and loud. The Passport Lounge is just off the lobby and has a small triangle shaped bar with five stools on each leg. Four bartenders were working non stop. We were fortunate to get two seats at the bar. and our pager buzzed us for dinner. We ignored it and stayed a while longer. We saw the Danish couple we had breakfast with the other day, and motioned them over to get our seats. Went to the dinining room, and was put a table for two. The tables are so close together that it is natural to visit with your neighbors (even if they don't want to talk). The menu was not outstanding, so I had a shrimp cocktail, rigatoni with mushrooms, peas, and proscutto (sp), with a pinot grigio white sauce (it was good) ,and a scoop of kiwi sorbet (awful) for dessert. LaRue had caprese salad, lamb in phillo, and the kiwi sorbet (she liked it). Said the lamb was good, but only ate 2 or 3 bites. The server was concerned but LaRue insisted she was full, and just could not eat any more. My plate was clean, but I told the server for effect that, "I did not like mine". Got to the late show which was a big production and the theater was full and standing room only. The theater is just to small for a ship of this size.

When we got back to our cabin we had a flyer promoting the Sail Away celebration for tomorrow night. It is billed as "The Ultimate BBQ on the lawn with the Executive Chef for an array of succulent dishes, live music, and unlimited wines. An event not to be missed". The cost is only \$89 per person. What a deal - but no thanks, we have other plans for the evening.

Wednesday, January 27

Coming into Charlotte Amalie, St Thomas, USVI this morning. Up early and got a walk in, and watched the gardeners working on the grass. The sprinklers had run earlier, and the deck was all wet. Beautiful coming in with all the mountains, white homes, and rocky reefs sticking up in the ocean. A cruise ship was following us in, but it

peeled off and disappeared out of sight. We docked next to the Holland America Westerdam that we took the Alaska cruise on. From deck 15 you look completely over the top of the Westerdam. The tour we wanted was sold out. The other tours were not appealing, so will just wing it today.

Went to the dining room for breakfast and shared the table with two single ladies, and a couple from Maryland, now retired in Florida. They were familiar with Idaho from their RV travels. He has a cousin that is a retired LA fireman that lives in Salmon (for those that don't know Salmon is where we both graduated from Salmon High School). The older lady was on our tour yesterday, and is from Lander, Wyoming. The retired couple was quite upset where we are docked as it is not the main pier downtown where they have docked four other times on this ship. The other single lady has had experience at this pier, and said a taxi will get you downtown. When you want to return they hold you up on the return fare. She recommended don't go there. Same with the beaches. She said she got transportation to a beach one time, and then couldn't get back without being grossly overcharged. Don't need any hassle ,so will stick around close.

We got off for a while and looked around the shops. Then had a local beer at a kiosk on the pier. The wind was blowing about 30 miles an hour and the bartender said, "hold on to your bottles or they will blow over". It is interesting to see that the most heavily advertised beer here,,and St. Martaan yesterday, is Coors Light. Three iguanas were loitering around. We watched the tourists going crazy getting pictures, and scampering out of the way. The iguanas were looking for handouts, so the bartender threw a few cherries at them. These were nasty looking guys.

Made our usual stop on our way to dinner, and saw the Danish couple arrive, so we gave them our spots at the bar when we departed. Went through the casino which is the largest one we have ever seen, and it was packed. There is a contingent of 300 St. Louis Cardinal fans aboard. They always wear their teams t-shirts. They were standing about 3 deep around a crap table, and making a bunch of noise. Found out later they are loyal fans and a couple of old managers, and three former players in the group.

The ships paper has a report on how much the slots paid out the previous day. The largest payout total for the day that I have seen is \$74,000. I would bet they take in at least 10 times that amount.

Had dinner with two ladies from Manchester, England ,and a couple from Alabama. Told the Manchester ladies that our grandson may be coming to Manchester to work. The Alabama couple knew a lot about Idaho as their daughter teaches in Rexburg, so not surprising to us to hear what church they belong to . Had a good long visit as the service was slow and horrible. A waiter poured my water, and got more on my hand and menu than he got in my glass. Not a word out of him. This seems to be a weak point on this ship. They have some excellent waiters, and a lot that are not up to par. There is no consistency in the service. A headwaiter breezes in and takes the orders, and then flunkies take it the rest of the way. It is pretty much hit or miss. I had a crab cake, penne primavera (not good), and an apple tart for desert. LaRue had pear blue cheese salad, beef short ribs (delicious) and crème brulee. Got to the theater for the show and it was over. We had been at dinner for over two hours and totally missed the show!

Thursday, January 28

Day at sea today and tomorrow. Nice day with sunshine, and a sea showing small whitecaps. Smooth sailing with just a slight roll side to side. Got my walk in early and always amazed how few people are out walking or jogging. Nothing interesting to report on there.

Had breakfast with a lady and her daughter from Maryland, and an older couple from Iowa City, Iowa. The Iowa couple are with a group of 40 from their bank. He says all of the banks in their area feature escorted group tours for their clients. It makes it really easy for them to go. On our way out of the dining room I spotted the foot and ankle surgeon. Stopped and asked him, "if we come through Amarillo could I drive the Ferrari"? He said , "certainly", and I think he really would! As we walked away he said,

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“it’s going to be cold in Idaho”. Ugh, thanks for the reminder.

Got back to our cabin and saw on LaRue’s telephone that her nephew Garth called last night. We immediately suspected something happened. LaRue called him back and found that her brother Val had passed away suddenly. They will have a service Saturday where they live in Safford, Arizona. Then something later in Cache Valley, Utah. We should be able to make that one.

Quiet day reading and sitting on the veranda. Made it to lunch in the dining room. I had key west salad, and took a risk on Nagasaki Udorn which was good, and orange panna cotta. LaRue had key west salad, a lamb shank that was big enough for two or three people, and ice cream. Our cabin is forward and the dining room is aft and we always go through on deck 4 through the shopping mall, and pass by the casino. Decided to come back from lunch on deck 5 and found the specialty extra charge restaurants, and high end shopping mall that we didn’t know existed. A whole new world to spend money in. The specialty restaurants, are Qsine, Blu, Tuscan Grill, and Murano (French). Really plush as well as pricey. Next to them is a private club with no indication of who the clientele is. There is also more casual extra charge eating places, the Bistro on five, Patisserie, The Porch Raw Bar and Seafood, and The Porch Special Dinner. The whole strategy with this cruise line is to get you to upgrade and spend more money.

The evening dress code is referred to as “dress up night” which is Evening Chic. I wore my blue blazer and turtle neck, and hoped I would fit in. There was everything from a few suites and ties to a few t-shirts and shorts. We were not expecting such a large turn out for dinner, and got there to find an hour wait. Guess it was because lobster was on the menu for the first time. Our pager never did go off. At 8:45 we went in and were seated at a table for 2. While waiting we decided to have Manhattans in our favorite bar. The bar guy that did the martini thing remembers us, and did a special presentation. He jammed the two shakers together and placed one stemmed glass on the bar, and the other one on a glass turned upside down next to the first one. Then he gave the shakers to LaRue to do the pouring. The trick is that when tipped to pour the

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first shaker fills the higher glass, and the bottom shaker fills the lower glass. The whole bar was clapping, and banging glasses. We were the star of the show. The bar guy even used top shelf stuff that is above our beverage package threshold. He winked to show it was on the house when I asked him about it.

We both decided to go with the lobster for our entree. It was pretty good size but sure wasn't Maine lobster. I thought it was pretty tasteless, but Larue thought it was ok after she got the waiter to drizzle more butter on it. You don't get your own butter as the server drizzles a little on and disappears. For an appetizer I had Scallop Rockefeller that was one scallop on spinach and Larue had the shrimp cocktail (a much better choice). For dessert we both had raspberry sorbet. Of course by the time we finished dinner the late show entertainment was over. Can only blame ourselves for not starting the evening earlier.

Friday, January 29.

The last day at sea. Will be packing up for getting off the ship tomorrow. Going through rain showers, and pretty windy day. Had to walk on deck 5 by the lifeboats where it was a little protected. Only trouble is the aft and bow sections are closed off ,so you just go up and back. I was the only one out along with a few smokers coming out to get a smoke.

Had a good table at breakfast with 3 other couples from Iowa, Michigan, and Tennessee. The gal from Tennessee ,and her husband, each had two cokes with breakfast. She only eats things in sandwich form, so everything went on a roll to make a sandwich. She said she had Beef Wellington last night and put it between two slices of bread! She said the Beef Wellington was excellent. The malls are jam packed with sale merchandise today and we could hardly get through.

LaRue has started packing, and finally found our left over euro's that she could not find to get converted back to dollars. Also missed a chance to spend them while in

Phillipsburg, as they took both euros and dollars. Will wrap this update up and get it off in a little while. It has been a good cruise, and a bit of an eye opener. Not sure if we will go out of our way to book on Celebrity again. It depends on the itinerary.

Saturday, January 30

Debarcation day in Miami. Had to be out of the cabin at 8am, so went up to the buffet for a quick breakfast. Came back to the cabin to collect our stuff, and proceeded to our designated waiting area which was the theater. Our debarcation number was near the last. We did not have a transfer booked or airline flight to catch as we planned to overnight in Miami.

Hardly anyone around when we walked off the ship at 9:30 figuring this was going to be easy. Then we saw the line before we got to the first of several baggage carousels. Our carousel was way down the line. We must have walked by 100 people in the customs and immigration line. Got to our baggage and now what do we do? Go all the way back and get in line or just get the bags and merge in - which is what we did. Got a few dagger looks (figured they wouldn't beat up on grandma and grandpa. Even then the line was at least 200 people ahead of us and hardly moving. Then we saw a porter with an empty cart and hailed him. He loaded our bags, and we bypassed everybody with him leading the way. A great guy also. Then we saw the source of the problem. There were only a few customs and immigration people on duty. They were taking all the time in the world to examine documents and ask questions. We had nothing to declare. He still asked a lot of questions, and was eyeball to eyeball (just remember not to swallow before answering).

Then it was a short wait in the taxi queue. Our porter tried to sweet talk his way to the front of the line, but the gal directing things said, "no way sonny". Got us in the cab, and away we went to our hotel by the airport. A porter is the only way to go as time is money to them. Well worth the tip.

The hotel we stayed at before the cruise had very small rooms and not comfortable. Cancelled the reservation we had for our stay after the cruise. Ended up in a Quality Inn for more money and more comfort. We were early and had to kill an hour and a half before they had a room ready. All kinds of people milling around and waiting for transportation to cruise ships - there were 5 big cruise ships docked this morning. No onsite restaurant. and the nearest about 3 blocks. We walked through a sketchy area to a Peruvian restaurant. We got back to the hotel to kill time, with no desire to go out and play tourist in Miami.

Sunday, January 31.

Up at 4:30am to catch our flight. Too early for the free hotel shuttle, and too early for the free continental breakfast. We had a taxi ordered and he was on time. Being in an airport hotel I thought it would be a short ride. We were on the opposite side of the airport and had to go all the way around. Anyway, we made it and even that early the airport was busy. Since we are flying free with frequent flier miles our routing to Salt Lake was through New York's JFK airport. So the next worry is making a 58 minute connection.

Delta uses two terminals at JFK, Terminal 4 and Terminal 2. If you have to go between terminals you have to catch the "jitney", which is a bus that only delivers you to the end of the terminals. Then you have to walk. We lucked out as we arrived in Terminal 4 at gate 41, and our connecting flight was in the same terminal at gate 24. Not bad at first look, except it was about a mile walk. Did not consider wheelchair assistance, since I had booked exit row seats (much more leg room) for these long flights. You have to give them up if you use wheel chair assistance. No problem though.

Another full flight. Interesting to note that in both Miami and JFK they were asking for volunteers to give up their seats for a \$400 voucher, and a seat on a later flight. During the three hour flight to JFK it suddenly dawned on me that we should have taken the offer in Miami, and held out for a more direct flight through Atlanta. Was not thinking clearly that early in the morning. Then it was another long five hour flight to Salt Lake.

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The seat was getting pretty hard about three hours into it. No connection problem in Salt Lake, as we had about three hours to kill.

Finally got on the plane and they announced they needed 2 people to give up their seats for a \$600 travel voucher each, dinner, a hotel room, and a flight the next morning. We looked at each other like should we do it? But we had put our carryon bags in the baggage hold because of the small overhead bins on the plane. We were lamenting the fact that we would need our carryon bags to stay overnight. A pilot sitting in the seat in front of us said "they will get your bags", but by then two people in the front jumped up. Those \$600 vouchers would have been nice. The \$800 vouchers we got going to Long Beach for last years cruise nearly covered our air fare for the flight to Dublin. Had another chance later when they announced we were overweight for take off, and needed 4 volunteers to get off for \$200 vouchers. We didn't even consider it as we were ready to get to Boise. Brian and Tina picked us up and we went to dinner and drove on home Monday.

lit was a great journey with everything happening as scheduled. We had 8 flights all on time and 2 nice cruises with no problems. Guess it doesn't get any better than that.

the end