

12/30/23

Panama Canal Cruise
Carnival Elation
September 15 – September 28, 2003
Long Beach, California to Galveston, Texas

Background

This cruise blog is created from memory, and the trip itinerary, as I was not writing blogs until 2010.

After our first cruise, in February, I was watching for another cost-effective cruise. I found that the Carnival Elation was being repositioned to Galveston, Texas through the Panama Canal in September. Repositioning cruises are very affordable, so we decided to go for it, even though our last cruise was on the Elation.

I had enough frequent flyer miles on Delta to cover our air fare from Twin Falls to LA, and from Houston back to Twin Falls. So, we would fly. This made the cruise very affordable.

September 13.

Departed Twin Falls at 9:37am on the Delta Connection to Salt Lake. Departed Salt Lake at 11am on Delta, and arrived at LAX at 11:53am Pacific time. We found the shuttle stop outside of baggage claim and booked the Blue Shuttle service to San Pedro. A Blue Shuttle van arrived a short time later. It was already loaded with about 8 people. We were the last to get off in San Pedro, so we had about a two hour tour. We didn't care as we were overnighing at the Vagabond Hotel in San Pedro.

We had dinner in a nice little Japanese resraurant next to the hotel.

September 14.

I was up early and went for a walk along the main street of San Pedro. San Pedro is a small town on the hillside overlooking the bay, and the Pacific ocean. It is an enjoyable walk with a view. I looked for our cruise ship at

the docks, but didn't see it. I assumed it was behind schedule. I got back to the hotel an hour later, and there was still no ship.

We could see the dock area from our hotel window. Another hour went by and still no ship. We were getting worried by this time. We checked our boarding time in our cruise documents, and we were not far from when we should be boarding. However, the ship would be in Long Beach at the new Carnival cruise terminal! Since we had boarded the Elation in San Pedro on our last cruise we assumed it would be the same!

The Long Beach terminal is only about 10 miles away, so it was no big problem. Good thing that we woke up though. We got a taxi quickly. We were on board by noon for lunch in the Lido buffet.

The new cruise terminal is owned by Carnival and is nice. The old Queen Mary is permanently docked as a hotel, museum, and convention center. The terminal building is the huge dome that housed Howard Hughes' Spruce Goose until it was moved to Oregon.

We sailed promptly at 5pm for the Panama Canal. The next stop is Acapulco. Mexico.

September 15-17 At Sea.

Nice cruising weather. The food and entertainment was great. We went to the late shows in the main theater. Hoped to see the young waitress, Val (Croatia), that we met the previous cruise on the Elation. She was still on board and remembered us

September 18, Thursday Acapulco, Mexico.

The ship docked parallel to the malecon on the main street of Acapulco. We got off and walked round looking and shopping.

September 19-21 At Sea

The weather and sea continued to be good. We watched the history of the Panama Canal on TV a lot.

September 22, Monday. Panama and Panama Canal Transit.

Arrived in the bay at Panama City at 4am, and I was up to watch. We came to a stop to wait for our 8am canal entry. There were ships all around us waiting also. We were told some could wait days.

At 8am we began moving towards the Miraflores Locks, which is the first set of locks. As if on cue a 10ft crocodile moved out in front of us and led the way. We passed under the busy Bridge of Americas and entered the locks. The locks would lift us 54 feet up to the narrow channel into Gatun Lake. This is the first of three locks on the 51 mile journey. It takes all day to get to the Atlantic Ocean. Gatun Lake itself is a fresh water lake 26 miles long. It provides the water to fill the locks and drinking water for Panama City, Panama and Colon, Columbia on the Atlantic side.

We were treated to a sight that few people get to see. The locks have side by side chambers, so two ships can go through in parallel. The chambers on our side of the ship were empty with workers doing maintenance in the bottom. We could see all the way to the bottom, and the workers looked very small. It was a long ways down there.

We had a good view from our window cabin on deck 5, but wanted a higher outside perspective. We went up a few decks and got a table and two chairs on the port side rail looking south. The deck above partially extended over our head and would provide protection if it rained. It didn't rain on us, but we could see lightening, rain, and thunder in many areas out over the jungle.

LaRue went down to the cabin once when we were in the locks. When she went in she could see out over the locks and the jungle. She came out of the bathroom and saw a wet concrete wall about three feet from the window. The water was being lowered and the ship was being lowered with it.

It was spectacular viewing the jungle, small villages, people, and animals. We even saw a lemur bounding along a road.

The Elation had a film crew following along onshore filming us. We would see them now and then filming, and we would wave. The filming was for a video that could be purchased in a few days for \$30. We bought one.

We were going through the second set of locks and heard a huge bang behind us. The overhanging deck above us caught on the concrete wall when the water lowered to lower us down into the lock. It mangled a set of stairs. The stairs were out of service the rest of the cruise. I had come down those stairs about 10 minutes before it happened.

We were in the third and last set of locks that lowered us to the Atlantic Ocean, and the gates wouldn't open. Now what happens? We sat there for over hour before they finally swung open.

September 23. Cartegena, Columbia.

I have a 2nd cousin, Mark, who has lived in Cartegena several years. He is a mining engineer for a coal mine in a remote part of Columbia and goes back and forth. We had sent word through his parents, Raymond and Bumpy, that we would be coming through.

The evening before we arrived the captain announced we would stop for fuel only. The security risk was high, and nobody would be allowed off the ship. Ocho Rios, Jamaica would be added to make up for Cartegena.

Nothing we could do. We had no way to contact Mark. Hopefully, he would come to the cruise terminal and discover nobody could get off the ship.

September 24. Ocho Rios, Jamaica.

We got off the ship and hired a car and driver to see the sights.

September 25. At Sea.

September 26. Cozumel, Mexico.

Very clear blue water here and the scuba divers love it. Too many people milling around as there are five cruise ships here. We hired a car and driver to show us around.

September 27. At sea.

Next stop Galveston. Smooth sailing in the Gulf of Mexico. Passed by many oil platforms.

September 28. Galveston, Texas

Debarked early and boarded a shuttle bus to the Houston Hobby Airport where we overnighted at the Hampton Inn.

September 29. Flew Delta to Dallas to Salt Lake to Twin Falls with no connection problems. It was a great trip and cruise.

The end

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