

**Mediterranean Cruise
Jan 8-Jan 29, 2014
Rome – Roundtrip**

Sun, Jan 5 and Mon Jan 6

Departed Boise for a connection in Portland, Oregon. One hour late arriving in Amsterdam making it a 11 hour flight due to winds and weather. Lucky we did not book through JFK. It was mostly shut down due to weather. Made our connection to Rome because that flight was delayed also. Baggage did not make it.

Spent a long time at the airport waiting in a line to report missing bags. A European guy told us that you need a two hour connection in Amsterdam for the bags to make it. Evidently true as we lost a bag in September when we went through Amsterdam to Edinburgh.

Found our hotel shuttle parking space but no shuttle arrived. Talked to another shuttle driver looking for easy money. He wanted 30 euros (\$45) for a 2 mile trip. Told him we would get a taxi thinking it would not be that much. Checked taxi rates and found that it is indeed what he was asking. He finally agreed to 15 euros total, tip included.

The online baggage tracker web site said the bags arrived on a 6:45pm flight. Still no bags when we retired early.

Really nice modern euro style hotel with nice outdoor patio. It is in a residential area about 3 blocks from the Mediterranean Sea with lots of restaurants. Wanted to eat at 5pm and go to bed early, but Italians don't eat that early. Found a nice place that the chef and owner was getting ready to open. He let us in. Suggested a bottle of wine while they got geared up. That sounded like a good idea.

Told him we just wanted to share an appetizer and a first course. We would decide on the main course. In the mean time we ordered an

appetizer of bruchetta with tomato's. Pretty soon 6 huge plates of appetizers (enough for 6 people), but no bruchetta appeared. His interpretation of sharing appetizers was the full range of the appetizer menu. We got all that sent back and the bruchetta came out. Then our shared pasta dish, and then our main course. Nice dinner but pricey.

Tuesday Jan 7. Extra day in Rome.

Still no bags. Now they say they will come at 5pm. Nearly 24 hours after they supposedly arrived at the airport. Guess it is the Italian way. Decided we had better stick around the area.

Had a nice walk along the canal and out on the jetty in the ocean. Really a nice place to visit and enjoy. It is where the residents of Rome come to enjoy the beach, fish, and vacation. Lots of fish they tie up on the jetty with their catch. Tons of seafood restaurants with fresh catch daily. Window shopped and surprised how expensive things are. A winter coat in the window was \$550.

Bags finally arrived at 4:30pm. We are ready to cruise, and relieved. Found a mom and pop restaurant and each had a really good Italian pizza. That and some chianti wine was all we needed.

Cruise day 1. Wednesday Jan 8

The desk clerk was worried that our transportation to the cruise port would not show up. She said shuttles to the port normally leave from the airport. I had a confirmation that they would pick us up at the hotel, but began to worry. LaRue was really worried. At 10am a Chrysler minivan pulled up with another couple inside, and it was our ride. The desk clerk was all smiles and gave us a thumbs up.

It was a nice one hour ride on a sunny morning north to the port city of Civitaccia (means old city). The driver was friendly and informative. We were discussing food, and he said it is always pasta for lunch, and no pasta at the evening meal. The trip was a bargain at 75 euros total (about \$100). The airport shuttles charge 75 euros per person.

Was afraid that check-in and boarding would be a huge hassle. Euro people do not understand forming lines and waiting their turn. Went like clockwork and we were on board in 30 minutes. The fastest we have ever

boarded! We like the ship layout, and the size at 2500 passengers. Every nationality on board and the announcements are in 6 languages. A lot younger crowd than we are used to, and we are among the oldest.

Had a nice late dinner in the aft main dining room, after the sail away festivities, with an English couple We both had prawns.

Went to the late show. Could barely stay awake and left early. Clocks go forward during the night.

Cruise day 2. Thursday, Jan 9. Sea Day.

A sea day which we needed after a short night and all the travel. I made it out at 8am for a walk on the Promenade deck 7 (the lifeboat deck). Only saw 3 or 4 couples the whole time, and they were not serious about it.

Our cabin is on deck 11 forward and starboard, just behind the bridge. There is a large observation window looking into the bridge. It is neat to watch the activity in there and view the radar screen. This morning we were approaching the narrow strait between Italy and Sicily. Several officers and the Captain were there. There is a lot of congestion in the two mile wide strait ,so they were pretty intense.

The bridge officer's cabins are across from ours on the inside, so we see them coming and going.

Really interesting going through the passage watching the city activity on both sides. Saw a huge active volcano on the Sicily side.

Formal dress up night tonight. Went to the main dining room for dinner. Low and behold we were seated with the same English couple as the night before. A young tall well dressed couple rounded out our table. They were from Greenland, and very interesting. His first name is Ujarak. Looked like a young Prince William. Her first name is Katrina ,and she goes by Kate. They speak Greenlander at home, as well as Danish, and perfect English. Kate said she learned English by watching American movies. Loved to hear how remote they are from the world, and how they live. They have to fly 4 hours in a small airplane to get to a major airport in Denmark. He said there are no trees or any agriculture in Greenland. The only industry is fishing. He is a civil engineer, and she works in telecommunications. Hope

to meet up with them again.

As far as the English couple, he is actually French. She is English, and loves to talk. He and I clash a bit and toss zingers at each other. When the Greenlanders sat down I said, "at last we got someone nice our table". Later he said, "I think it was a Frenchman, Lafayette, who came to your assistance and helped you out in the Revolutionary War." I said, "yes, and thank you for 1 guy 1 time. We have been bailing you guys out ever since".

Cruise day 3. Fri, Jan 10. Katakolon, Greece.

In Katakolon (Olympia) Greece today. Beautiful weather and about 50-60 degrees F. This where the Olympics started in 776BC, and where the Olympic torch is lit for all the games. We were here 4 years ago and toured the Oympic site, so did not take a tour today. Got off the ship and walked around the small town. Got on a trolley and toured around for 30 minutes. Lots of people walking around as an MSC cruise ship is in port also. Back on the ship with our patio door open and we hear a big dog barking and rooters crowing.

Nice evening. Attended a member's party and met the senior officers. The Captain is an older Swedish guy with a good sense of humor. He introduced the other officers and made us guess their nationality by telling us what drink their country is famous for. He introduced the engineering officer by telling us his country is famous for Jack Daniels. After we guessed he said, "since when did Tennessee become a sovereign country"? Surprised to see an American senior officer, but he looked very Italian.

Shared a table with an older (he was 71) Italian couple. They said they were from Rome. After a little conversation they live about 5 minutes south of the cruise port, which is about 50 miles north of Rome. They warmed up and we had a good time. Their next cruise will be a 100 day around the world cruise. Makes us start thinking bigger.

LaRue had salmon and I had a rib eye steak to see if it might be better than the latin sirloin steak (heavy garlic) the night before. It was the same thin cut and only marginally better. No more steak for me on this cruise. LaRue's salmon was good, and the lamb shank she had the night before was good. The only misstep for the evening was LaRue knocked over her

red wine. Then she said, "sorry, I guess I was talking like an Italian".

Cruise Day 4 - Sat, Jan 11. Athens.

This cruise has been really smooth sailing with very calm seas so far. Much different than our other cruise in the Mediterranean with very rough seas.

In Athens today. Did not book a tour as we were here 4 years ago, and saw all we wanted to see. It is a huge port (Pireaus) with ships and high speed ferry boats everywhere. Will debark after a leisurely breakfast in the main dining room.

Sunny with a lot of smog and a temp of 60-65 degrees F.

Watching the loading of supplies this morning. They loaded box after box of fresh pineapples. Wonder where they come from.

Got off the ship at 11am. Caught a hop-on hop-off bus and rode around Athens. Saw graffiti and tourists. It all looked Greek to us.

Had dinner in the aft main dining room and shared a table with a nice French couple from Toulouse in southern France. She did not speak English but he did with a heavy accent and at times we would reach an impasse. Then she would tell him what we were saying so I think she understood a lot. I had a rather dry chicken kung pao and LaRue had pork medallions which she really liked. Great cuisine is not a strong point with NCL, in my estimation, but it is on the ok side. Seems I always order the wrong thing. The potato leek soup was really good.

Cruise day 5 - Sun Jan 12. Izmir, Turkey.

Overcast and foggy, but fairly decent temperature. Long night as I was wide awake at 2am. Must have been excited about getting back to Turkey after 56 years.

Finally got up after 5am and went for my walk. Nobody but me on the Promenade deck. This whole trip there is nothing to observe or report on the walking/jogging scene. The Promenade deck is great for walking as it goes completely around the ship. It is sheltered with lifeboats overhead.

One lap is 668 ft and 2.67 laps is one mile.

After my walk I went up to the sports deck on top to see what was going on there, and there were only a couple of people. The sports deck only covers about 1/3 of the ship. It is exposed to the wind, so I prefer the Promenade deck. This ship has one of the best.

Left on our tour at 8am to the House of Virgin Mary in the mountains, and the Roman city ruins at Ephesus. We were blown away with the place. We walked about 2 miles down through the ruins. Have seen roman ruins but nothing of this scale. The most interesting tidbit was the lavatory facility. It was originally a big room with 49 outhouse stone seats side by side over a deep trench. The spacing was about 18 inches apart, and used by both sexes. Our tour guide, named Khan, said that with the thousands of Romans that lived there you had to reserve a seat 15 days in advance.

After the ruins we stopped at a very nice resort hotel with an extensive buffet.

Then went to a rug manufacturing place where they are made by hand. Some of the larger rugs take up to 2-3 years to make. They were way out of our price range. They served us the potent Turkish liquor, Raqi. I guess it was to loosen us up. I remember it well. I learned not to drink it when I was stationed in Turkey.

Had a dinner table with 2 American ladies from LA and Anchorage, who were college mates at NYU, and get together for vacations. Interesting conversations about careers, kids, and cruising. Went with the prime rib. It was not much different than the sirloin and the ribeye I had earlier in the cruise.

Decided to skip the late show and get some sleep. The seas are still calm, and the ship hardly moves.

Cruise Day 6 - Mon, Jan 13. Cruising and Istanbul

Cruising along this morning on our way to Istanbul. We arrive at 1pm and stay over tonight. Sunny day but very hazy. Nice in the sun and cool in the shade. We have a tour booked. Will be among the first off. and tour all afternoon and all day tomorrow. I spent a few days in Istanbul on my way to Samsun, Turkey on the Black Sea, in Nov 1957 and Nov 1958. Anxious

to see how much it has changed.

Had a great afternoon touring the Tokapi Palace and Museum, a boat tour of the Bosphorus strait, then an hour at the Spice Market. Istanbul has really grown. It is busy and we love it. Enjoyed the boat tour as it was the same route I took on the Turkish boat to and from Samsun.

LaRue bought an ounce of No.1 Iranian saffron for \$14 in the Spice Market. The spice market covered blocks and was unbelievable. Got back to the ship at 6:30pm with very tired feet and ready to unwind.

Really nice dinner. Had to wait about 20 minutes, and we got free champagne. Got seated at our table and the French couple, we had dinner with one night, went by going to their table. They saw us and requested to be seated with us. We were flattered. Had a great dinner and conversation. Larue had turkey dinner and I had New Orleans shrimp.

Passed up the late show for sleep as we have to be on the bus at 8am in the morning.

Cruise Day 7 and Day 2 in Istanbul - Tue, Jan 14.

Just got back from a long hard day touring. Overcast grey day and temperature around 55 F. Left the ship at 8am for the Blue Mosque and was there by 8:30. Funny thing when we arrived, and standing in the square. One of three stray dogs walked into our group and laid down on a guy's feet. The dog went by a lot of people and singled out the guy.

We had to obey all the Muslim rules inside the Blue Mosque, with no shoes and women covering heads. It is a huge place covered in carpet for getting down for prayers. The inside columns supporting the dome must have been 20 feet in diameter. Interesting in that one person was running an upright vacuum like a Kirby. Must have been 3-5 acres of carpet.

From there we walked across to the St. Sophia. It is now a museum after originating as a church in 360 AD. It was converted to a Mosque, after being conquered by the Ottomans in 1453. It is much larger than the Blue Mosque. Columns and marble from the Roman ruins at Ephesus were used in construction of Sophia. From there, more walking to the Archeological Museums consisting of 3 large buildings stuffed with artifacts.

Too much to comprehend.

Then we went down into the Underground Cistern. It was built in the Roman era to supply water for the nearby palace. However, it was not used by the Muslims, as their religion does not condone the use of stored water. The domed ceiling was made of brick supported by 336 large columns. It had a couple feet of water in it with huge fish swimming around. Pretty spooky.

After nearly 5 hours on our feet the bus rejoined us and we went to an upscale hotel and restaurant for a sit down Turkish lunch. First (appetizer) course was a big plate for each person with about 9 items that defy description. Then a green salad followed by a big plate of thin beef slices, something like mashed potatoes, rice, and some type of okra. After that a big plate of really sweet desserts. The Turks really like their sweets. Noticed that most people did not eat much. Our tour guide said it was more of a Turkish dinner than a lunch. No resemblance to the dinners I had while in Turkey.

We had an interesting table, with a young couple from Australia, a mother and daughter from Buenos Aires, Argentina, and a couple from Minnesota. They liked my stories(I guess) about my early days in Turkey.

After lunch it was back on the bus and off to the Grand Bazaar for almost 2 hours. It was totally unbelievable in size, the number of shops, and was over whelming. We were very glad to see the bus and get back to the ship. Larue haggled big time for a silk scarf. She finally got for about a third of the asking price. Her bubble got burst when another lady got the same scarf a dollar cheaper. The action reminded me of Mexico.

It was a 9 hour tour and we were only on the bus about an hour and 15 minutes.

Had a late dinner in the main dining room and shared a table with a nice couple from North Carolina. We hit it off, and discovered we will be staying at the same hotel, the Comfort Roma Airport, when we get off the ship. Plan to have dinner together that night since we know the area. Also, will be going to the airport at the same time the next morning. I had Norwegian salmon and Larue had a pork chop. Skipped the ballerina performance at the late show

Really starved for news and the NFL scores. The only news channel is BBC, which does a great job over and over with South America weather, European soccer scores, Euro economy, and the affair of the French President. All important stuff.

Cruise Day 8 - Wed, Jan 15

A sea day and just what we need to rest up. Sunny day and starting out at 59 F. In the Aegian Sea this morning, and the sea is picking up with small white caps. The ship is moving around a little more each hour. It looks like it is the end of the smooth ride for a while.

At breakfast in the main dining room the English/French couple were at another table. He came over to hail "his American friends". Then she came over and talked nonstop. She is a real ding bat. He told us a story of how she tried to feed the customs dogs in Miami, and got in real trouble. Our French couple at another table waved and were very friendly. Guess we have been accepted.

Nobody but me walking this morning on the Promenade deck. Just one Japanese lady doing the stretching and arm pointing thing while standing in place. Once in a while a smoker will come out. It is nice and peaceful.

Looks like a reading and napping day, except for a nice lunch and a 2pm briefing.

At lunch we ended up with the English/French couple again purely by chance. All afternoon we passed close to Greek islands with high mountains on both sides of the ship. Do not see much habitation. One had a bunch of wind turbines on the side of the mountain, and just a few buildings around.

At dinner in the aft main dining room we were seated with 2 guys from Wales. One was visiting his daughter that works in the ships spa, and his friend came along. They were explaining where Wales is located, and I told him we had been to Wales on a business trip back in 1978. Turns out they live less than 10 miles from Usk, Wales and know the 3 Salmon Inn where we stayed for several days. We both had dover sole with a mushroom risotta, which was not too bad.

The late show was the Motown Singers. See one Motown group and you have seen them all, so we did not stay long. Clocks go back one hour tonight, so get some extra sleep.

Cruise Day 9 - Thu, Jan 16. Sea Day

Another sea day before Naples. About 60 F outside with sunshine and big cumulus clouds. A few rain clouds on the horizon. Sailing across the wide open ocean between the Greek islands, and the southern tip of Italy. The seas are decent, and the ship is very steady.

This ship has an interesting Hawaiian motif and decor that does not fit its current Mediterranean routes. It was commissioned in 2008 as a US registered ship which requires an American crew. It was named the Pride of Hawaii. It and 2 other NCL ships were built just for cruising Hawaii, which did not work out. So, this ship was renamed the Jade with a Nassau registry, and moved over here. It has found a great niche market.

The main aft dining room, named the Grand Pacific, is beautiful with wood paneling, It has huge garish Hawaiian murals on the walls and garish carpet, as does all of the ship. The mid ship pool area does not get much use. It does not have a retractable cover, since it was built for the Hawaiian market. Seems strange to walk through the pool area and see only a few hardy people. It is a nice ship and we like it. The menu, the food, and the service could use some improvement. It rates an ok. The ship has a tremendously nice itinerary that we love. We are happy.

We have decided upon our most interesting cruise person. We see him almost every day and I have nicknamed him the "Manchurian Cowboy". He looks Manchurian with a flat nose and face, and very slanted eyes. The first time we saw him was from the back. He looked like a cowboy with bow legs, euro style high heeled boots, old levis, belt, a vest, and a black narrow brimmed hat that resembles what Frank Sinatra wore. We were quite startled when we saw him from the front. Every day he wears a different vest, etc. Then yesterday we saw him in a nice long black coat, and a different hat. He is so interesting that we have to talk to him.

We noticed this morning in the dining room that there were no salt or pepper shakers on the tables. We were told it was because of the

periodically required sanitation process. Then before lunch it was announced that gastrointestinal problems were being reported, and to take extra precautions. Also, you have to be served in the buffet lines. First time we have run into this, and it is scary.

We were seated at lunch with a couple from Florida and two Australian gals. We were having a nice conversation and discussed the sickness problem. Then one of the gals said she was really ill when she boarded, and the other said she got really ill last night! We could not believe what we were hearing. Could not wait to get out of there. How stupid to sit at a table with others when all you have to do is ask for a table for two.

Read and napped all afternoon. About 6:15pm I suddenly remembered as Latitude members we had an invitation to a reception at 6:30. We hurried down for a wine and cheese reception and a chance to chat with sr. officers. An officer with more gold braid than a Navy admiral came over to our table and introduced himself. He was French and has worked on cruise ships since 1985. His job is head hotel honcho. We gave him tips on how to run his hotel. He said if we have any problems to call him anytime. Should have mentioned our loose toilet seat.

At dinner we had an odd pairing of bbq short ribs and coconut shrimp, along with some chianti wine. Was probably the best dinner we have had.

Skipped the late show as did not want to be around a huge gathering of people, and the theater was jam packed.

Cruise Day 10 - Fri, Jan 17

In Naples, Italy or Napoli in Italian. Decided not to book a tour from the ship. We got off and went on our own. Found the hop-on hop-off bus stop nearby, and waited for about an hour for it to come by. We were in front of the ferry terminal, and it was fun watching the people catching ferries. Saw a sign for the ferry to Croatia. Eleven hours and the cost was 28 euros (about \$40).

Got back on the ship about 3pm and went to the buffet where they are taking sanitation very seriously. You could not touch anything to serve yourself. Kind of hampers your ability to graze over a wide spectrum of food that you don't need.

At dinner in the main dining room there was no table sharing allowed, because of being extra careful for sanitation. We had a nice table by a port window. Larue had a beef skewer, and I had parmesan crusted chicken breast with cheese tortellini. Watched a fussy lady send back her steak that were not cooked to her liking two times. Finally the maitre'd brought out a special steak with a very pleased smile on his face. She sent that back also.

Interesting to note the difference in dining habits in Europe. We get right in the dining room about 8pm. People start arriving in droves and the dining room fills up around 9pm.

The late show was a very talented lady with a violin, but it soon got old. The theater was only about 20% full. Probably because it is the last night aboard for about 2/3 of the ship.

We head back to Port Civitavecchia (Rome) tonight for the end of the eastern Mediterranean cruise. A new batch of people come aboard for the western mediterranean leg.

As we departed Naples the Captain announced that we have had 9 days of smooth seas. Tonight the sea will be rough, and you will get your moneys worth. He was right. He also announced that 2 chicks did not return to the ship in time and were left in Naples.

No rumors or announcements of how widespread the sickness issue is. Will probably never hear. Not sure if it isn't a routine caution after visiting Istanbul.

Day 11 - Sat, Jan 18

Arrived in Port Civitavecchia at 5am. Debarkation started early for those that had to catch early flights from Rome.

The wind is really blowing and starting to rain (our first) with a temp of 61 F.

We are about an hour north of Rome and the airport. It is a major industrial port and not cruise passenger friendly, so will not do anything here. If we do get off we have stickers to wear (Still on Vacation), and

simplifies the reboarding process.

Need to find a currency exchange or ATM to get some Euro's, as we spent our last Euros in Naples.

Got off the ship briefly but nothing in the terminal. Got back on board to get ahead of the general boarding of the new passengers. No free wifi either.

New batch of people aboard, and on our way north.

Service in the dining room was slow and drawn out. Asked to share a table but no one showed up. The sanitation procedures in the dining areas have been lifted. I had sliced sirloin and mashed potatoes, and Larue had prawns and rice.

The late show was a preview of the shows to come during the cruise. Really rough seas leaving Rome but smoothed out later. It was rough enough that I opted for some dramamine.

Day 12 - Sun, Jan 19

In the port of Livorno, Italy. Up early for our tour. It starts at 8:15 leaving Livorno and an hour ride to Lucca. The tour guide said it rained cats and dogs all night, but we were now getting a break. The fields are all flooded with water.

Lucca is a great little walled in city with narrow streets too narrow for car traffic. Got off the bus and walked and hung out for 3 hours.

Had a little snack in a bar/ristorante then got on the bus for Pisa. Just as we got to the parking lot in Pisa, for a tour of the leaning tower and area, it started pouring down rain with thunder and lightning. As they say, the tour goes on rain or shine. The bad part was about a mile walk to the leaning tower. We had an umbrella, but bought another one from a street vendor. Got pretty wet by the time we got there.

Had a great lunch in a ristorante. We had pasta Pisa style with bolognese and mushroom sauce. One order would have been enough but we each ordered one. Sure wish we could get Italian food at home like that. I don't like to say, "worth dying for" but it sure was "worth living for". A little house

red wine helped out the dampened spirit also. We were lucky that the little enclosed patio we were in had patio propane heaters to warm us up, and dry out a little. The rain did subside for our mile long trudge back to the bus. We arrived at the ship at 4:30pm. LaRue logged more steps on her pedometer today than she ever has. Touring is hard work.

Odd thing about the day is that we buddied up with an Argentinian couple. On our last cruise we were touring Argentina. Nice couple who spoke excellent English as well as Italian. She took off her shoes and socks and dried them under the propane heater as we ate lunch.

It was a great day in Lucca and Pisa. As I sit here before going to dinner, the thunder and lightning is really popping. We went up to the Star Bar (one of our favorite cruise ship bars) for a martini on the sail away before going to dinner. The Star Bar is on the top of the ship and looks out over everything. We were the only customers and visited a lot with our waiter, a young guy from Peru. He is excited about going to the Olympics in Soshi after this cruise. When we get off, the ship will spend 3 days in transit, with an overnight stop in Istanbul, then on to Soshi. We were wondering why we were canceled out for the cruise starting the 29th. NCL took a contract from the Russian Federation to provide a floating hotel in Soshi. Did not make us happy, but were able to reschedule for this trip.

Dinner was another table for two. The late show was one we had seen.

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Day 13 - Sun, Jan 20

In Monte Carlo, Monaco today. Sunny with some clouds and about 60 F.

Docked next to a huge sea going yacht that must be 300 feet long. The name on it is Atlantis 2.

Have a tour booked leaving the ship at 12:15pm, so we can lounge around all morning. We are docked in downtown Monte Carlo and sure is beautiful.

Our tour traveled through Monte Carlo then up the mountain switchbacks to the old city called Eze, founded in 1100. Built on a big rock and we climbed a lot of stairs to get to it. Just small shops and narrow walkways. Glad to see an ATM in front of the postal office and got \$200 worth of euros. Had

time to share a really good pizza and a couple of beers for about \$35. Do not know how the locals can live here on the average salary of 1300 euros per month, which is about \$1800. Then there are the rich people. Passed a car dealership with a Maserati and a Ferrari in the window.

Stopped at the palace and visited the cathedral where Grace and Prince Ranier are entombed. Back on the ship little before 5pm with departure imminent. It is now just a little after 5pm and the ship is starting to shudder and shake as we start moving away from the pier.

Dinner menu was just so-so. I tried the bean and vegetable burrito. It was Italian style according to our waiter Mario. We had Mario when we first got on the ship, and we hit it off, so we asked for him. Great service from Mario and his crew. Larue had the lamb shank, and she said it was better than the first time. The show was spanish style ballet . We struggled to stay awake, so we left.

Day 14 - Sun, Jan 21

Toulon, France today. We only traveled about 100 miles last night at about 10 knots. Woke up about midnight and we were in really rough seas, as we hit strong gale force winds. Did not sleep good due the rockincomesg and rolling, cabin creaking, and a drawer that would not stay closed. It was a long night.

Nice 5 hour tour today up the coastal area of Bandol ,and stopped along the beach for an hour. A large daily flea market was set up selling eveyrthing from vegetables to fur coats. Nice to start remembering some of the French we once knew. Can read the signs and generally figure it all out.

Most interesting thing was the toilets along the sidewalk. A small building for one person with status lights on the outside. Green light means available, and you go in. You finally figure out to push the button inside. The toilet seat comes down A red button shows outside. No way to put the toilet seat up for a man, as it is hydraulic. When finished you push the button and exit. Then a shower activates and washes down the entire inside. Eventually the status lights show it is ready for use again. A slow process for a line of people. Larue told me about it, so I reopened the door after I came out and saw the wash down in progress. I guess if you don't

get out of there in time you get a shower also. Great stuff for us tourists.

We then went to the hill-top Le Castellet village, founded in the 11th century. Narrow walkways and shops and small living quarters. Saw a shop selling panama hats from Equador. Another shop with a route 66 backpack. Stopped at an auberge, and would have loved to have had lunch, but our leisure time was up. Had 2 small glasses of beer for \$9.

Still daylight as we departed Toulon, France. We went up to the window looking into the bridge and watched the action. The departure route was tricky and we followed a pilot boat that took a big S route out of the harbor. On the bridge we had a local French pilot, an officer in the left seat, the captain in the right seat, the staff captain standing behind, and 3 or 4 more officers observing. When we got out of the harbor the French pilot shook hands goodbye and went below, after a few low key high fives. Then on overhead monitors we could see the sides of the ship and the pilot boat approaching.

The pilot went over to the side opening and down a ladder into the pilot boat. Quite interesting.

The Captain then gave up his right seat to a young female officer and came over in front of us to make his evening announcement. He said we left 2 people (chicks) behind again. Since they were not on a ship sponsored tour they are on their own expense. Good reason not to go on your own and be late (a little commercial there). He said tonight we would be going through an area known for high winds and rough seas, and he expects it to be that way tonight. Be careful walking about.

I came back to the cabin and took a precautionary low dose dramamine! Better not wait until it is too late, in my opinion. The ship is already starting to bounce around. However, after dinner it got better, and no problems the rest of the night.

Larue is getting the sniffles and cough, so we requested a table for two to be sort of isolated. Dinner was rather unremarkable ,but we had a nice waiter from way out in the jungles of Peru. He said where he lives, it is the start of the Amazon river.

Tomorrow it's Barcelona and a full day of touring. Hoping for smooth seas tonight.

Day 15 - Wed, Jan 22

In Barcelona, Spain today. Grey and overcast. The coolest day of the cruise, starting at 42F. Left on the tour at 8:30am and cruised the city for a while. Then we stopped at the Sacred Family Basilica which is probably the prettiest and most spectacular that we have seen, and not that old. It was a church until Pope Benedict declared it a Basilica in 2010. Construction began in 1892 and was taken over by the architect Antoni Gaudi in 1893. He guided the project for 43 years. It is still not finished, and the projection is maybe 2030. Some say it will never be finished. Big enough to hold 14,000 people, and 8,000 people can worship there at one time.

After that it was a lot of walking in the gothic downtown area with free time to shop and have lunch. We found a nice little place and had some pasta and house red vino. Kind of expensive here at \$55 for lunch. Barcelona has the reputation as the most expensive in Europe. Kind of interesting in that the average wage is 1000 euros a month (approx \$1500). The unemployment rate is 26%.

We were rerouted on our walking tour due to a large protest in progress by the unemployed. A lot of police around. Also, a lot of pick pocket people. If you watched carefully you could see them surveying the crowd, and circling around for position. A light rain started about lunch, so we had to put up with that. Also visited roman ruins, another old church, and an old Spanish village. I have seen enough of that stuff. Everyone was happy to get back to the ship at 4:30pm.

I watched the action on the bridge again as we departed Barcelona. It was a simple departure and the Captain (Lars) just stood behind the consoles and observed. The local pilot, a young good looking guy, departed before we even cleared the breakwater barriers. But I noticed him interacting a lot with the young female officer (rather snappy looking) off on the side of the bridge rather than directing the operation of the ship. When he departed he shook hands with all on the bridge, but kissed the gal on both sides of the cheek. There was a little hand contact between them. Interesting stuff.

The ship only comes through here every 3 weeks, and will miss the next rotation while in Soshi.

Went to a Lattitudes's reception at 6:30pm for wine, snacks, and meet the officers. They draw cabin numbers for prizes. The cabin next to us won a free bag of laundry. Good thing we did not win it as we just had a bag done on a promotion for \$24. Got prompt service on the free wine as our waiter was the young Peruvian that we talked to in the Star bar the other night.

At dinner I had Louisiana blackened red snapper and gumbo. Larue had sliced leg of lamb, which she said was not too bad. Mine was ok.

Skipped the show again for sleep. Being a tourist every day is hard work.

Day 16 - Thu, Jan 23

In Valencia, Spain this morning. It was founded in 168BC. A few clouds but mostly sun and 52F to start the day.

We had a short tour early of 4 hours called Easy Valencia, but still quite a bit of walking. We first stopped at the ultra modern complex called the Arts and Sciences Museum. The modern futuristic architecture is outstanding. We were rerouted because a major movie is being filmed at this location. The movie is something like "Tomorrow" starring George Clooney. They were starting a scene and the actors were wearing futuristic stuff. I took a picture and got admonished. Later 100's of people were taking pictures, but I obeyed the rules. Copyright stuff.

We then toured around the city seeing lots of 13th and 14th century buildings, walls, etc. Lots more old stuff. We walked to an old square called Place du Virgen. WE took an hour leisure time, and waited for a special event at 12 noon. The event was the weekly Thursday tribunal for illegal use of water rights. Centuries ago 8 canals were dug to provide water to the city and for agriculture. Water belongs to the people, but 70% goes for agriculture. So, 8 water judges, one for each canal, preside over the water rights and set the times and amount for water. Violators are cited and have to appear on the next Thursday tribunal with their lawyers (of course). The 8 judges decide guilty or not guilty. A fine of 100 euros must be paid on the spot if guilty. The tribunal was short today as there were no violators. Our tour guide says she has not seen many, and the judges

seem to enjoy the process as much as the spectators. On our leisure time we stopped in a small bar/cafe on the square and ordered a small beer. When it came time to pay I asked for the "check please" in Spanish. Our waiter beamed and said, "your Spanish is very good". We all laughed. He appreciated the effort. The beer was good too.

This morning the Captain announced a change in our itinerary. We were to have a day at sea tomorrow (which we were anticipating) then arrive in Sardinia the next day. However fierce winds are predicted. We will go to the island of Palma de Majorca, Spain instead. Then we will have a day at sea and go directly to Tunisia and bypass Sardinia. Sort of disappointed but not too much as Majorca is a place I always planned to go to when in the air force.

Leaving Valencia, Spain and headed for Palma, Majorca. Watched our departure from the bridge viewing window as it is one of the best views in the house. Only 4 or 5 people show up so you do not have to look over anybody. I got there just as we were moving away from the pier. It was just the young female officer in the left seat working the control. Then Captain Lars strolled in view with a wad of Kleenex, a cup of coffee, and wearing his slippers. He sat down in the observers chair behind. Then a new staff captain (from Russia), who just came aboard, sat down in the right seat. The local pilot departed early and just shook the captains hand. No interaction with the young female driving, but then she had control of the ship. Have to find out more about her. Do not find her picture posted with the rest of the officers.

Before we cast off I was looking down from our balcony watching the stevedores releasing the ropes. On the last post below me there were 2 ropes to be cast off. The first one came off, but they could not get the second one off. The ship's crew then started winding the ropes in and one stevedore had his foot in the loop of the loose rope. He did a dance and got away before he got yanked into the water. Needless to say he directed a few stares and words towards the ship's crew. I thought he was a gonner for a minute there.

Visited our waiter friend in the Star Bar then went to dinner in the main dining room. Swore I was off of beef on this ship. Settled on the everyday choice of NY strip steak and baked potato (not your russet variety) as the other options were not in the range of my taste buds. Larue went for the

prime rib. One thing we have noticed on this cruise is that lobster and escargot has never been on the menu. I doubt they will ever show up.

Went to the late show that was a singing and dancing thing. We lasted about 30 minutes.

Day 17 - Fri, Jan 24

Palma, Majorca, Spain today. Fairly good day. Had a short 4 hour tour. Went along the waterfront, and out in the mountains to another mountain village named Valldemossa. The tour guide recommended the hot chocolate. It so good people in Palma drive up there Sunday mornings to have hot chocolate and potato cake. It was really thick and sweet. We passed on the potato cake. Then it was back to Palma for more cathedrals, castles, the bull ring, etc.

Majorca is noted for pearls and Larue bought pearl earrings at a pearl factory and gift shop.

Had some free time downtown, so we opted for a beverage in an old place founded in 1892. The waiter was slow (and old). We got back to the meeting place 5 minutes late, and our bus was gone. It was also the bus stop for the shuttle bus to the ship, so we were able to catch it after somewhat of a hassle. Tour busses are supposed to account for all tour passengers before leaving, but since it was announced that you could stay longer and catch the shuttle he just decided to leave. We did lose our nylon carry bag and cheap umbrella that we bought in Pisa.

Back to the ship by 1pm and a grazing lunch in the buffet. The buffet gets tiresome when you have to eat breakfast there every morning you have an early tour, and lunch there if you get back early afternoon. Best thing about the buffet is watching what people take. I have noticed that asians take more, and eat more than anybody. They pile the plates up and go back for more, or just start out with 3 heaping plates. They sort of stuff things in.

Watched our departure from the bridge viewing window. It was a pretty straight out shot with no drama. The local pilot departed right after we cleared our mooring, but did get chummy with our female officer as he left.

Captain Lars was funny on his announcement. He said, "I know the men

had a very stressfull day watching their wives shopping and spending large amounts of money on pearls and things". Then he added, "my recommendation is to go find a bar and try to relieve all the stress". He also warned us that weather was building up ahead of us and the ride will get rougher. He then got up and waved to us and gave a thumbs up.

Another quiet dinner for 2 as Larue still has the cough. I had stroganoff and she had roast chicken from the everyday menu, and it was all ok. Same little waitress gal as the night before and she was happy to see us. Said she will finish up in the dining room about 11pm and has to be back for breakfast service at 6am.

The show was acrobats and we did not stay long.

Checked with lost and found and they had our blue bag and umbrella. Had to sign a receipt for "Lost Non Valuables". Larue is happy to get her bag back. I was already resigned to our loss.

Day 18 - Sat, Jan 25

A much needed sea day today as we head for Carthage, Tunisia tomorrow.

The sea is up, and the ship is rolling a little from side to side. The wave category is moderate, which is up to 8 ft. During the night it was so smooth I thought we were dead in the water, and would soon be abandoning ship. The alarm never sounded.

Going to breakfast this morning in the main dining room and a woman in front of us took a hard fall on the bottom landing of the stairs. She got up but her shoulder was hurting. There is a grand stair case with 10 steps that you have to descend to enter the dining room. The carpet is a deep lavender and the last step before you hit the bottom is red carpet as a warning. Your first impulse with the red stair is that you have reached the bottom. But no, there is one more step, and I think she messed up on it.

Got our nice little waitress gal as the last two nights again this morning. Larue's cough is getting better, so we shared a table with a really nice couple from Dublin, Ireland. Just the kind of people that you could be friends with forever.

The sun was shining in on our patio and there was no wind. Our temp gauge on the door read 92F in the shade! So, I went out on our deck and read. It was difficult as my e-reader is hard to read in direct sunlight. We have had our patio door wide open all afternoon listening to the ocean go by.

Noticed as we grabbed the elevator to go to dinner that barf bags were available. The sea was not that bad, but I guess the steady roll side to side is getting to people.

The dinner menu was not all that great, so we both had the turkey dinner.

Went to the late show, which was 4 male singers that put me to sleep.

Day 19 - Sun, Jan 26

Carthage, Tunisia today. Windy, clouds, and about 55 to start the day.

Booked a 4 hour tour that did not start until 9:15, so we got a little break. A little more of a 3rd world look here with camels, mosques, etc.

People were worried about being here on Sunday, but it is a normal day for Muslims. The Muslim holy day is Friday, so things were humming.

Our tour took us out to old Roman ruins and a city called Sidi Bou Said. It reminded me of my days in Turkey 53 years ago. The city is known for its white buildings, trimmed with blue around the doors, windows, and porches. The blue color is supposed to keep the flies away.

We bought some cheap souvenirs and stopped for mint tea in a typical Muslim tea shop. Everything is bargained for, even the tea, which had pine nuts floating in it. It was one of our more interesting tours. Had to walk into a wind that was so strong you could hardly make headway to get back on the ship.

Went to the buffet for some lunch and met an enjoyable couple from Sioux Falls, SD. Then an older Asian couple sat down with plates heaped to the max. As I mentioned earlier their eating habits are enough to drive you up the wall. Larue wanted to move to another table. Except for noodles

everything is speared with a fork, and it all goes in at once or chewed off the fork while it is held straight up in the air. Thats my 2 euros worth on that subject.

Was not going to watch our departure from the bridge tonight until I saw what was in front of us. A rock jetty was across the front of the bow and the ship had to make a 20-30 degree left turn to hit the opening, which was only about 3 times the width of the ship. The bridge crew was a lot more animated, and Captain Lars was in the right seat. When we cleared he gave us 2 thumbs up. Larue said, "looks like the pilot will be leaving us". A newcomer to the bridge scene ,and a know it all, said, "oh no they don't get off until we are well out to sea". Right then the pilot turned and left the bridge. We just smirked.

The Captain in his announcement said ,"there will be pot holes in the road tonight, so you may want to go to Guest Services and get those wonderful pills. Do not wait until you start getting seasick". Enough said for me. Captain was right. At 7pm the waves are up to 18 feet and we are bouncing.

We have to walk the length of the ship to get to the main dining room. It was really tough walking tonight, but made it. Requested our favorite waiter, Mario from the Honduras. We decided to forego the wine because it might not set well as rough as it is. So, Mario presented us with a complimentary glass of wine!! Could not turn down his good intentions. The menu choices boiled down to where we both had prime rib, which turned out ok.

Decided against the late show and got to bed fairly early. It was tough sleeping the way the ship was rocking around. It finally smoothed out around 5am as we got close to Palermo.

Day 20 - Mon 27

In Palermo, Sicily today which was founded by the Arabs in 800BC. I started coming down with a head cold. Was hoping to make it through the cruise scot free. We had a 4 hour tour today and we were more than ready to get back to the ship when it was over.

Palermo is beautiful with a high mountain range behind. Getting tired of old villages and old churches but we got more today. The one big Catholic

church up on the mountain was worth seeing though. It was built by the Arabs as a Mosque around the 11th century, and has a heavy use of gold inside. Our tour guide says many people believe it is the 8th wonder of the world.

One of the things you have to be looking for while on a tour is the next toilet facility. The most interesting thing was about the 2nd church we visited downtown, Our tour guide pointed behind the altar. In the back of the altar was a hidden opening to toilet facilities. It blended right in. Larue checked it out and it was for real.

Went to a Lattitudes wine and cheese party, then had a quiet dinner.

Starting to wind this cruise down . We just have Naples tomorrow. We were in Naples 11 days ago, so believe we will just lay low. We were planning on going to the ruins of Pompeii, but it is a long trip. Will pack up and maybe go have a good Italian lunch in a ristorante as it is only 3 or 4 blocks to the downtown area.

As we left Palermo the captain said we should have a smooth ride. It was until after midnight. Then we really got hammered again

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Day 21 - Tue, Jan 28

In Naples today, and just going to take it easy, as it was a long night. We have a full day booked touring Rome tomorrow.

Booked the ships excursion in Rome. We get escorted off the ship at 7:30am, pick up our bags, and board the bus. We tour Rome all day and get dropped off at the airport around 5pm. Then we get the hotel shuttle (if it shows up) to our hotel which is close by.

Will wrap this up now and use the last of my remaining internet minutes to send this and check messages.

The end

