

12/24/23

**Panama Canal Cruise  
Holland America Oosterdam  
Fort Lauderdale – San Diego  
April 13-28, 2019**

**Apr 11, Thu.**

Departed Twin Falls on Delta at 6:35pm. The pilot announced before takeoff that it would be bumpy on climb out. Instead of turning out over the south hills as usual he turned and came back over downtown Twin Falls. It was a pretty sight seeing the Perrine bridge and looking down into the canyon as we flew along. It is an impressive view. It turned out that the flight was as smooth as glass despite all the towering cumulus clouds.

The Salt Lake hotel shuttle picked us up. We were in a nice large room with a couch and easy chair by 7:30pm. I visited the convenience store next door and picked up a sandwich and chips for dinner.

**Apr 12, Fri.**

Up at 4am to catch the hotel shuttle at 5am. Through security and at our gate before 6am with plenty of time before our 7am flight to Atlanta. The plane was parked at the gate overnight, and was covered with snow. We had to pass through the deicing station. That took 35 minutes and would have been a problem in Atlanta with a close connection. However, I had picked a 3 hour connection, so it was no problem for us. We only had a muffin at the Salt Lake airport, so purchased a box snack on the flight. No problems connecting in Atlanta. We landed in Ft Lauderdale about 6:30pm. It was about 80 degrees and humid.

The hotel shuttle picked us up and we were at the Comfort Suites hotel nearby by 7pm. Very nice hotel and a large room with a separate sitting area with a large couch. The walk-in shower was the biggest we have ever seen. It was about 8 feet long by 3 feet wide. A convenience store was a block away, and I got a sandwich and kettle chips for dinner. Also, two bottles of wine that we are allowed in our carryon bags.

**Apr 13, Sat.**

About everyone staying at the hotel was catching a cruise, as there were six cruise ships departing on Saturday. Catching the hotel shuttle would be sheer chaos. They charged \$10 per person. We opted to take a taxi that I knew would only be a little more. Then we decided to try Uber for the first time. I ordered Uber on my cell phone

as we left the room. He pulled up in a nice clean Hyundai Sonata as we came out the front door. The driver did not speak much English, and his GPS was taking us to the wrong area of the cruise port. We directed him as we could see our ship.

Security was very tight getting into the cruise port. We had a long line time getting through the entry point. With all of that the fare was only \$12.96 that went on our VISA card on record. Within minutes I received a receipt via email on my phone. We were very impressed with Uber and will not hesitate to use them again.

We got wheelchair assist for LaRue. The port attendant bypassed the long line and took us directly through check in. He took us to a holding area for wheelchair people as ship attendants must go the rest of the way. We sat for over an hour, and no attendants ever came. Another half hour and our original port attendant returned. He said he was now authorized to take us. Then security stopped us at the last ramp. LaRue decided to walk the rest of the way. Not exactly a smooth boarding.

We were ready to graze the Lido buffet. When we got back to our cabin our bags were there. Got unpacked and then it was the lifeboat drill conducted out in the heat and humidity. Holland America still does it the old fashion way - standing under the lifeboats.

Interesting sailing out the narrow channel. Nice homes with big grass back yards line the channel. All kinds of people out watching the cruise ships depart. They wave, toot air horns, yell, and wave signs. We sat on the veranda with our evening libation and waved back.

Mostly old people on this cruise. Lots of canes, walkers, scooters, and wheelchairs. Average age must be in the 70's. We fit right in.

A lot of empty tables in the dining room for dinner. We both had a great creamy corn chowder with green chiles that was excellent. LaRue then had ceviche and I had a chopped farmers salad. We both had diablo shrimp for the entrée that was excellent. LaRue had ice cream for dessert and I had Dutch apple pie.

### **April 14, Sun.**

I was the only person out walking on Deck 10 this morning. This ship is the same as the Eurodam that we were on in January, so I know the layout.

We had breakfast in the main dining room. I had eggs benedict and LaRue had a southwestern omelet. Shared a table with a nice couple from Delaware.

The weather is good, but the sea has whitecaps, and 5-8 foot waves. The ship moves around a little. We passed a small sailboat this morning and he was having a rough ride. I did not want to be with him.

Lunch was a Sunday brunch in the main dining room. What a feast. I had a charcuterie board with assorted cheeses, dried meats, salami, olives, etc. for an appetizer, and LaRue had a fruit plate. We both went with prime rib with Yorkshire pudding, mashed parsnips, carrots, and potatoes. Way too much for lunch. The prime rib was excellent and a perfect medium rare. We both had apple crisp for dessert. Might have to pass on dinner but know we won't.

Went back to the cabin and LaRue watched Tiger win the Masters. I couldn't watch it, so sat out on the verandah and dozed off for a while.

Went to dinner in the main dining room at 7:30pm. Shared a table with 2 nice ladies from Ohio. They said they have been friends since kindergarden, and ravel together often. One's husband died, and the other gal was divorced. One lady said two of her daughters announced the same day that they were engaged . The other one said her two daughters announced divorces on the same day. We ended up talking long after dinner was over.

We both had a regional favorite shrimp cocktail for an appetizer. LaRue had a turkey dinner and I had Chef Rudi's weinersnitzel for entrees. LaRue had Grand Marnier something and I had a raspberry Sunday for dessert. LaRue did not care for her turkey entrée as it was all white. She likes dark meat. The head waiter wanted to bring what she wanted, but she declined. I liked my dinner.

It was late so we returned to the cabin.

## **Apr 15, Mon.**

Only one out walking on deck 10 this morning until later when a guy showed up. The temp is 80F and the humidity 82 at 7am. Huge clouds and rain squalls all around. The ship is moving around with a slight roll and a slight pitch forward and aft along with a quartering wind. Walking was difficult. By the time I got back to the cabin I was feeling a little woozy, and got out the Dramamine.

We went to the dining room for breakfast at 8:30. I ordered a ham and cheese skillet with two poached eggs on top. It came with sour cream on top and looked revolting. At that point food was the last thing I wanted, and bowed out.

After a two hour nap I was ready to go again, starving, and ready for lunch at 12:45. We both had fish and chips and a blueberry Sunday that were very good. The Dramamine and nap worked.

LaRue had been waitlisted for the Panama Canal railroad dome car tour, and her ticket came. She was worried if she could handle the walking. We visited the tour desk to get more information about walking and access. She decided to go for it.

We attended a lecture at 2pm on, "What to see at sea in the Caribbean". We learned there are 22 of 83 known species of whales. Also, white caps occur when the height of the wave reaches  $1/7^{\text{th}}$  the length of the wave. That causes the wave to dampen in height, and not continue getting higher. A tsunami can reach speeds of 400mph. We do not have to worry on a cruise ship as the ship will ride over it.

Saw on the news this afternoon that the Carnival Fantasy cruise ship rescued 23 people from a boat sinking near Yucatan, which is not far from where we are.

Formal night, so had to dress up for dinner. Went to the dining room at 7:15pm and said we would share, but wanted a table with Randy and his assistant Jovan. Ended up with no companions as there were lots of empty tables. Had a very nice dinner. We started with jumbo shrimp cocktails that came with a special regional sauce. Asked for cocktail sauce and it made a great shrimp cocktail. LaRue couldn't decide between the shrimp cocktail or mussels, so Randy brought both. She liked them both and then had a salad. I had a Japanese chicken soup with noodles. She had rack of lamb, and I had peppercorn tenderloin steak. Both entrees were excellent. She finished with a lemon merengue cheese cake and I had a strawberry Sunday. I have gotten hooked on the Sundays as the vanilla ice cream is so good. I have had raspberry, blueberry, and strawberry Sundays the last three deserts.

We were just finishing dinner when the general alarm started. On the first blast nobody paid much attention. When the blasts continued everyone froze when they saw the staff stop what they were doing. The alarm stopped one blast short of "report to muster stations". After a while an announcement said there was an emergency and gave a coded message. The staff went back to what they were doing. Then an announcement followed that the fire has been contained. It was a scary time for a while.

The ship is rocking around. We nearly had people land on our table when the ship rolled as they were walking by.

## **Apr 16, Tue.**

Docked in Cartagena, Columbia at 7am. I was up walking and it was pretty coming in. Lots of white high-rise buildings. More than the last time we were here. I checked my cruise log and we were here April 17, 2009.

Had a leisurely breakfast in the main dining room. We are not doing a tour as we toured the city the last time. We leave around 1:30 today so there is not much time in port anyway.

I got off and walked about 400 yards to the terminal area. There was a shuttle bus, but didn't want to wait. It was 91F and humid but enjoyed the walk. I got a local beer and sat outside in a jungle like area. Watched the flamingos and parakeets and tourists. Did not stay long as we had to be back on board by noon.

Went to dinner and saw our two lady friends from Ohio walk in, so we got them at our table. LaRue had liver and onions which she liked, and I had lasagna, which was terrible. Our waiter asked me about it, and I told him in a nice way. We were sitting there visiting after dinner and one of the main chef's came out and asked me about it. I told him it wasn't to my liking and why. He listened but didn't comp our meal. We had a good visit with him.

### **Apr 17, Wed.**

Up walking early and could see our approach to the canal entrance. I counted about 50 small container ships and tankers anchored. They were waiting for their slots. We went straight to the entrance behind another Holland America ship, and a container ship for our 8am start. I could see off to the left where the new lock was, but could not see any ships. The old lock has three segments, which in total raise a ship 85ft to the level of Lake Gatun.

We had a great ringside seat from our balcony, and opted for breakfast in the cabin. We also had the bridge camera showing on our TV. A commentator explained what was going on, and provided historical facts.

Once in the lake it is a long cruise to a second set of locks with three segments for another elevation gain. Then it is on to the Miraflores locks which lower the ship to the Pacific Ocean level. From the upper deck of the ship I could see the new locks but there were no ships visible.

The last set of locks, The Miraflores locks, has a visitor center which is 5 stories with balconys for tourists to view the ships passing through. The balconys were loaded with tourists waving as we passed by being pulled by the locomotives at 3mph. We could talk to them they were so close.

We exited the Miraflores locks at 5:20pm. The trip through the canal took 9 hours 20 minutes. We were worn out as it was around 90 degrees, and mostly sunshine all day. I was also all over the ship getting views from different decks, and the bow of the ship.

It was about 6:30pm by the time we anchored in the bay for an overnight stay in Panama City.

We ended up at a table for 10 for dinner. Nobody could hear, so we mostly talked to the couple by us, who were from Vancouver. Turns out he is a cousin to the late Dave Nelson who managed the Hewlett Packard ranch near Mackay. I met Dave a couple of times, so I knew something about him and the ranch.

Wasn't too thrilled with the dinner menu. We had both had a shrimp appetizer, and I had a strange pasta dish that I have never heard of. Only so-so. LaRue had a pork chop that was tough. She had a strawberry Sunday and I had a banana crisp for dessert. Hard day today, so we retired early for a hard day of touring tomorrow.

### **Apr 18, Thu.**

Had an early breakfast in the dining room. Then met at 9:15 in the theater for our tour of the Panama Canal on the dome railroad car. Was worried about tendering with the ships lifeboats, as boarding a moving boat is not easy. Also, a lot of stairs involved for LaRue.

The tender was moving up and down about 2 feet, so you had to wait for the moment the ship and tender was fairly lined up. Then take the big step across the chasm.

When we got off the tender the tide was out, and the ramp was steep. I don't know how some of the old people made it. Our tour guide met us with a nice bus and driver. She gave us a running commentary as we drove in to catch the train.

Boarding the train was easy and we zipped away. A hostess brought us coffee (great coffee) and a box of snacks. We travelled beside the Panama Canal to the Atlantic and the port city of Colon. We retraced our trip through the canal on the ship.

We enjoyed a Panama beer, which was a light lager and extremely good. We got off the train and our bus was there to pick us up, take us to the new visitor center for the new locks, and to return us back to Panama City to catch the tender to the ship. Our tour guide handed out ham and cheese sandwiches as we reboarded our bus.

The visitor center had a great viewing area overlooking the new locks. We saw a huge container ship going through. The new locks are a much slower process, as they take longer to fill and drain. Plus the gates slide open and close taking a lot more time than the old gates that swing open quickly. Our tour guide said only 10 ships can make it through in a day. It takes 12 hours for a full transit. There are two sets of locks with just one channel through. .

Our tour guide made it sound like the new locks were a disappointment, after all the hoopla and the money spent. It does nothing to ease the backlog of ships waiting to go through the canal. The new locks only accommodates ships that would have had to go around South America.

The bus ride back to the ship was via a freeway through dense jungle and mountains. We hit a rainstorm as we got back to the port around 4pm. It was a wet and slippery process boarding the tender, and then the ship. We made it, and it was a really great tour. We feel like we know and understand the Panama Canal. We have now had three full transits by ship, and a round trip transit by train and bus.

Evening dinner menu was rather strange. Ended up at a table for 2 with Randy. We had a shrimp appetizer thing. I went to the everyday menu for a NY strip steak and baked potato that was unremarkable. LaRue had braised brisket that was tasty. I had a small chocolate thing for dessert and LaRue had a strawberry Sunday. Randy said my dessert was too small, and wanted to get me something else, but I declined.

Clocks go back one hour tonight so will get a lot of sleep.

**Apr 19, Fri.**

A sea day. I was ready to go at 6am and make my rounds. Stopped in the Observation lounge and saw we are only doing 13 knots. That is 15mph. Two container ships overtook us as I was doing my laps. Guess the distance is not too great to reach Costa Rica tomorrow, and we are throttled back. The temp was 81 degrees and the humidity was 94. I like it. We have 7,000 ft of water underneath us this morning.

It is gray overcast, and looks like the clouds are building up for some rain today. The sea is calm with a glassy look. The ship moves just a little. The Pacific today is a lot different than the Atlantic ,that always had an angry look and feel.

Shared a table for breakfast with a very nice lady from Adelaide, Australia. I had pancakes and Larue had Dungeness crab eggs benedict that I helped her with. We had a very nice normal conversation with our tablemate, and enjoyed visiting with her. Her husband is aboard but did not come to breakfast. They get off in Vancouver. The ship then goes to Seattle for the summer doing the Alaska cruise. Speaking of Vancouver, it seems like half the ship is from Canada.

Lunch was in the dining room. I had a pasta ziti thing and LaRue had trout. Then we went to a talk titled, "The Complex Habitats of Central America". Following that was a ventriloquist show, "Matilda and Patrick Murray" that we stayed for. The show was hilarious and every seat in the big theater was filled. Matilda was a Jamaican bimbo puppet. Patrick had the accent, and puppet movement down perfectly. She told about

Patrick coming home one night very drunk, and threw up on her weiner dog. Patrick looked down and saw the mess and said, "did I eat that?".

Had dinner with a couple from Toronto that we enjoyed. The menu was complex with selections that were hard to figure out. Each selection was a recipe and favorite of one of the advisory chefs for the cruise line. Each item seemed to have combinations of things that were weird. I decided to be safe and had prime rib with vegetable hash and croquette potato. It was a beautiful piece of prime rib medium rare on a bed of chopped veggies. That was covered with a wine reduction sauce that was sweet. The top was covered with cream of horseradish. After I scraped all of that off, I had a nice piece of prime rib. But, it was still tainted with the stuff. Not what I wanted. LaRue had sole that was coated with something that made it look and taste like egg foo yung. We did have a good bean soup appetizer and decent ice cream dessert.

Our table mates had the booze package for the entire cruise and hit the wine pretty hard. They stayed after we left.

## **Apr 20, Sat**

Costa Rica and Puerto Caldera this morning which is an industrial port. At 6:30am it was 81F and 84 degrees humidity. Going to be a hot one today.

Shared a table with two older ladies from Pasco, Washington this morning. We had a lot to talk about. They are retired school teachers. Lifelong friends that travel and cruise together. One is in a wheelchair, but they keep going. This is their 6<sup>th</sup> time through the Panama Canal, and they seem to have been all over the world. They are avid Tri Cities hockey fans, so we had to tell them about Bev and Tom and their hockey connections. Their next cruise is to Alaska this summer. Great ladies.

I decided to have the scrambled eggs and veggie skillet with chips and salsa. It came with scrambled eggs on a bed of rice with a side of spinach with tortilla chips and a dab of salsa. Rice did not appear on the menu description. I was surprised in a negative way. There were some other new selections on the menu that I had no idea of what they were. Holland America is getting carried away with some of their menu items. Quinoa is one of the big ingredients. Guess I will stay with the basic American breakfasts from here on out. Larue had a quinoa parfait starter and lox and bagels for a change of pace. She loved both of her selections.

We got off the ship around 11am to catch the shuttle to town, which we thought was close. Turns out it was about 20 miles along the coast to Puntarenas where we docked the last time. Being Saturday, the locals were setting up their camps along the beach for the weekend. Very interesting to see.



We had a local beer named Imperial and watched the locals in a small café. A newly printed sign said local beer \$3 which was their special for cruise ship customers! Got to make it while they can. Caught the shuttle back and it was a very nice round trip. Pretty third world and trash everywhere. Well worth the trip and was just like a tour, but free.

Got back to the ship and grazed through the Lido buffet. I had a big salad and excellent sea bass. LaRue had a salad and rack of lamb. Then it was ice cream time. The ice cream is so good that we cannot pass it up. Now back to the cabin and nap time.

Shared a table at dinner with a guy from San Diego and his lady friend, who announced she was from Norway. He ordered two entrée's, but only ate one. She only had a very small appetizer. Strange menu tonight. I ended up with roasted tomato soup, a salad, shrimp and crab fried rice (rather blah). LaRue had chicken corn soup, salad, and salmon. We all had a triple chocolate dessert.

## **Apr 21, Sunday.**

Happy birthday today to Caitlin

Pulling into Corinto, Nicaragua this morning. Felt cooler, but it was 81F at 6:30am and the forecast is for 99F.

I wore my cap while walking because of the bright sun. A gust of wind caught it, and it went sailing into the ocean. It was my favorite cap that is now consigned to the Pacific.

The two ladies from Pasco were at the table across from us this morning at breakfast. LaRue had the European cold breakfast plate that had cold sliced ham, cheese, sliced beets, pickles, boiled egg slices, sliced tomato's, cucumbers, sliced red onion, and fish in a sour cream thing. I had a southwestern omelet.

Lunch is a short Easter brunch from 11 to 1pm in the main dining room. We had a quick lunch and headed to the gangway to get off. The tide had come in and the ramp was so steep that the returning people could hardly get up the ramp. Had to wait for a ramp to be put out on a lower deck. Many of these people should never have ventured out they are in such bad shape. A heavy lady with one leg was in a wheel chair and it took three people to get her aboard. One old bent over guy got off in our group and needed medical help as soon as he hit the pier.

We hired a young guy with a pedicab for \$20 to haul us around town for an hour. We stopped and got a local beer named Tona which was good.

This is the most 3<sup>rd</sup> world place we have been. Much like I saw in Turkey in 1958. The mode of transportation is mostly bicycles and pedicabs. Very few cars and trucks on the streets. Being Sunday and a very hot day (around 100 degrees F) families were out on their front steps sitting around cooking food and drinking stuff. A few had inflatable plastic pools for the little ones to play in. We enjoyed seeing it all. Many people from the ship found it hard to take. It sure felt good to get back to our air-conditioned cabin.

The dining room was busy since it is Easter Sunday. However, we didn't have to wait. Ended up at a table for two with our favorite waiter, Randy. We were adjacent to a table for four, so it is only natural to talk to them. Turns out one couple was at the table for 10 the second night when we couldn't hear each other. They are from somewhere around Edmonton. The other couple was from near Roseburg, Oregon on the Umpqua River.

We ended up talking after dinner until we finally realized we were the last people in the dining room. The Oregon guy told the story that when they moved to their property on the Umpqua River he promised to build a deer fence, if he could have a fishing boat. He got his boat but never got around to building the fence. One day he got a call from a guy asking all kinds of questions about his boat. He finally asked the guy why he was asking about his boat. The guy was answering an ad in the paper. The wife didn't get the deer fence, so she advertised his boat for sale.

I had beef pepper pot soup, a green salad, and prime rib with a baked potato and sautéed green beans. This was the normal prime rib dinner and not the celebrity chef version that I did not like the last time. It was a little on the rare side but was fine with me. LaRue had roasted brie, a salad, and leg of lamb. Deserts were different berry and pastry options. It was a good Easter dinner with good dining companions.

## **Apr 2, Monday. Puerto Quetzal, Guatemala**

It was a cool 80F approaching the port this morning around 7am. This is the port where LaRue bought the purple bag when we were here on the South America cruise. She washed it in the sink to make sure it was clean, and the dye stained the sink purple. I thought we would be buying a new sink. It eventually came clean with the help of some cleaning stuff, and our cabin attendant. She left the bag on the ship when we debarked in New York City.

Breakfast in the dining room was quiet as people are getting off for tours. I had a Belgian waffle with two eggs and LaRue had a breakfast berry parfait and Swedish pancakes.

We have toured the area, so will get off later and look in the little shops. I may get a cap to replace the one I lost.

We got off the ship around 11am. There is no city nearby. There is a nice area for cruise ship passengers with lots of small shops. A lot of expensive artist stuff, and a lot of cheap junk. I got a cap for \$10 and LaRue got a souvenir magnet for \$4. We had a Guatemalan beer named Gallo (rooster) that we have had before. The price was \$4 each. The highest we have paid so far on this cruise.

We were surprised that the little bent over guy that needed medical attention yesterday was chugging down the ramp with his walker. He is bent over so far he can't see ahead. You have to get out of his way. He blew right by LaRue.

We didn't stay off the ship long as we did all we wanted to do, and it was hot. Good to get back in the cool confines of the ship.

The dining room was not open for lunch, so we hit the Lido deck buffet.

Shared a table at dinner with a couple from Vancouver Island. Nice people, but she was very dominant, and knew it all. Weird menu. We both had black bean soup for an appetizer, then a small green salad. LaRue had beef tenderloin slices and I went for a strange mixture of macaroni and cheese and seafood. A few bites of that was enough. The two shrimp were good.

## **Apr 23, Tuesday. Port Chiapas, Mexico**

Clock went ahead 1 hour last night, so we are back to Central time.

Dark at 6:30am. Got up and put on my shoes in the dark and one felt different. I thought it was my sock. Got to the cabin door and saw I had my shoes on the wrong feet. I often get my shirt on inside out in the dark, but not my shoes. Decided I better not go topside with my shoes on the wrong feet.

Pulling into the harbor at 7am. On my walk I swung through the Observation lounge to get the days vitals. It was 77F and humidity 84 degrees. The forecast is for 95F and haze.

The little port is pretty and the area around is flat. It is all green and palm trees. The cruise terminal is the largest palapa I have ever seen, and is shaped like a pyramid. Port Chiapas is on the border of southern Mexico and northern Guatemala.

We shared a table at breakfast with a 91 year old gent from Victoria and a couple from outside Seattle. Everyone at the table had a different version of French toast.

We got off the ship about 11am. Checked out the shops and live entertainment inside the big palapa. The nearest town is Tapachula, about 30 miles away, and we decided

to ride the shuttle for \$10 each. It was a scenic ride, and we were thinking we would come to a small dusty village.

It was a bustling city that the tour guide said was 800,000 people. The streets were narrow and the sidewalks full of people. It was around 100F. We opted to catch the next shuttle back to the ship.

I am not sure, but this may be the city we drove to when I visited my folks in Guatemala in January 1959. We drove from Guatemala to the first city across the border in Mexico to buy stuff they could not get in Guatemala. Mexico and Guatemala at the time were fighting. We worried about crossing the border. We found the two sides were drinking tequila together, and could care less about us. True story.

Shared a table at dinner with a couple from Florida who had retired there from Michigan and Wisconsin. Couldn't get any background out of them, but had a big discussion on cruising. She did most of the talking for the two. They were not drinking anything, but she seemed crooked. I had a salad, sweet and sour tempura shrimp, and a tart like something for dessert. LaRue had a shrimp taco, salad, pork belly, and crème brulee for dessert.

#### **Apr 24, Wednesday. Huatulco, Mexico**

Nice sunny day and was 78F and 82% humidity at 7am. Forecast is in the 95F range.

A Mexican Coast Guard gunboat pulled up beside us about an hour out of port, and escorted us in. It is comical seeing these guys with AR-15's and a 50 caliber front mounted gun taking pictures of us with their cell phones.

This port is surrounded by high bluffs and mountains and is beautiful to cruise into.

Shared a table at breakfast with two couples that were both from western Washington state. The one couple had a dairy farm that the kids took over and are now selling it. He said the sale will be complete by the time they get back, and they are not happy about it. The other lady was a pain in the rear. She knew it all and spent a lot of time extolling the virtues of Bill Gates. Who cares about the richest rip off artists in the world. I kept my mouth shut.

I had to try the corned beef hash and eggs. The hash was strange with a sweet taste. At least you don't overeat if you don't care for it. LaRue had the English breakfast that she likes so well.

The pier is very long. The sun is beating down and it is hot. LaRue elected to stay on the ship. I got off for a while. The little old bent over guy with the walker was chugging down the long pier when I got off. I saw him later going through the shopping area. He weighs 70 pounds or so, and his legs are like toothpicks, but he keeps going. I thought

he was on his way out of this world when we saw him in Nicaragua shaking and getting medical attention.

Beer was \$5 so I elected to bypass beer that I can get at the Sea Monkey in Puerto Vallarta for \$1. I elected to return to the cool confines of the ship. LaRue was taking a nap.

We shared a table at dinner with a very nice couple, Kathleen and Peter from Canterbury England. The menu was Mexican themed, and she had seafood enchiladas. They were really seafood tacos. She was stumped how to eat them. We told her how to attack them and she cleaned her plate. I had chicken fajitas that were sort of like the real thing. LaRue had sliced beef tenderloin that she said was very good. We both had strawberry Sundays for dessert.

### **Apr 25, Thursday. Sea Day**

Cruising along at 14-15 knots on smooth seas with a few clouds in the sky. The temperature was 77F and humidity 84 at 7am. The forecast is for 85F. Next port is Manzanillo tomorrow morning.

Quiet breakfast in the dining room at a table for two, which is nice at times. I had eggs benedict and LaRue had a ham and cheese skillet that was overly large.

After breakfast I was sitting on our verandah reading. I glanced up and saw something white heading straight for me. Then I made out a small outboard boat coming from the West and the open ocean. Land is not visible to the East, so we must be at least 50 miles out. Wonder why such a small boat would be out here and coming from that direction. He finally cut the motor about 50 yards from us, and waited for us to pass and the wake to die down. It had me wondering if it was a terrorist attack. There were three people on the boat.

We have not seen any dolphins so far, but I keep looking. People have said they have seen them. I have seen very few sea birds this whole trip, and that is very unusual. The whale migration through here is over. Hoping there might be a momma whale and her calf still around while the calf builds up for the journey north. There is a possibility of that around Puerto Vallarta and Cabo San Lucas.

Dining room closed for lunch as it is reserved for the Captain's lunch for the 1 star Mariners. We are 2 star Mariners. Our lunch will be on one of the two days at sea between Puerto Vallarta and San Diego. After this cruise we will be 3 star.

It was lunch in the Lido buffet that we are not real fond of. Just had soup and a sandwich and a vanilla cone. Pizza and the hamburgers on this ship are not to my liking. Good Nathan's hotdogs though.

Tonight is a dress up night. This is only the second one. Everyone was dressed nicely for a change. Saw one strange guy. He was about 70 and had a full head of white hair. He was wearing a nice expensive black suit with a bright shirt and bright tie. He really stood out. However, he was wearing big clunky sandals, with no socks, and he had large ugly toes. We couldn't believe it.

We shared a table for dinner with a nice lady, Gayle, from Medford, Oregon. She came to dinner alone because her husband was glued to the TV watching the NFL draft. We hit it off and she invited us to join them tomorrow afternoon. They have one of the private cabanas reserved on the very top Deck 11. They will be celebrating their 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary with champagne.

The dinner menu was nice but there was no lobster, which we have always had on formal nights. So far lobster has only been on the menu for a \$20 surcharge. We both had a nice jumbo shrimp cocktail, soup, salad, and filet mignon oscar with asparagus. This ship is definitely changing the way they do things. The old regulars are complaining about it.

### **Apr 26, Friday. Manzanillo, Mexico**

The decks were all wet this morning, so must have passed through some rain. The temperature was just 67F and the humidity 94 at 6:30am.

We shared a table for breakfast with two couples, and both were from Seattle. LaRue had a salmon omelette and I had buttermilk pancakes.

The last time we were here we docked at the container port area which was pretty rough. This time we are right in front of downtown at a long pier. It looked too far for LaRue to walk. I got off and it was a long walk on a narrow pier. They had some chairs along the way for people to rest. I estimate it was about a half mile to the Malecon and downtown. The little old guy with the walker was like the energizer bunny working his way down the pier. I walked along the Malecon and returned to the ship.

We had lunch in the Lido Buffet. Then went to visit our new friends at their cabana. There are 15 cabanas and theirs was the largest one on the corner. Really impressive with an 8 foot couch, an 8 foot table with chairs, and several chaise lounges. Nobody around as only 3 are rented. It is totally private. A waiter served us champagne, frozen grapes, and chocolate covered strawberries. Dwight, the husband, said the rent is \$85 per day. They have it for the whole trip. We visited for a couple of hours, and they said to drop by anytime.

Shared a dinner table with a nice couple from Sandy, Utah. He grew up in Kanab where his folks owned the big restaurant in Kanab. He knew the Mosdell's, and Dr

Mosdell, who moved to Arco. He practiced in Arco when we were there. He was killed in a car wreck near Howe. Dinner was pretty ordinary. I had a shrimp cocktail and a pasta thing. LaRue had the shrimp cocktail, a salad, and some seafood on a skewer.

### **Apr 27, Saturday. Puerto Vallarta**

The temperature at 6:30am was 72F and 84 per cent humidity. After breakfast I walked to our resort. My favorite porter was tickled to see me. Talked to Lario, our jewelry guy on the beach, and bought a copper bracelet for LaRue. Thought it might help her rheumatism. He told me to bring lots of money in October. I said I would bring my “seesster”, as she buys a lot, and he agreed.

I went back to the ship and got LaRue. We went out to catch a cab to oldtown and the Sea Monkey for \$1 beers. The marina taxi people kept trying to put us in a 10 passenger van that was stuffed full at \$5 per person. I kept telling him we wanted a taxi for 2 people directly to the Sea Monkey. He kept insisting and I kept saying no.

Finally, we got our taxi for \$10 total direct to the Sea Monkey. We established a rapport with the driver as we discussed PV. On the way he pointed off to the left and said he lived over there. I said, “over by Ernesto’s”. He came back with, “you really do know Puerto Vallarta”.

At the Sea Monkey LaRue had a shrimp avocado salad and I had a hamburger. Passed on fish tacos this trip. Got back to the ship about 2:30pm. Weather was good and not too hot.

Went to the Ocean Bar before dinner to have a martini. The bar tender and waitress were wearing orange wigs, as tonight is a celebration of the Netherlands, and the color orange. They looked really good. LaRue got a complimentary string of orange beads.

We got a table for two for dinner. We both had a shrimp cocktail and salads for starters. I had linguini carbonara and LaRue had veal. Her veal was tough, so they brought another plate, and it was fine. My carbonara looked weird but tasted good. I had Dutch apple pie and she had something with ice cream for dessert.

Clocks go back an hour tonight to put us on Mountain Daylight Time.

### **Apr 28, Sunday. At Sea**

Temperature was 71F and humidity 84 per cent at 6:30am with cloudy sky. The sea is fairly smooth and we are doing 18 knots. It was one of the prettiest sunrises I have ever seen this morning while I was out walking. Multiple layers of clouds were a bright reddish orange across the eastern sky. Then the sun came up between the horizon

and the clouds. It was a huge reddish orange ball. It was really a sight, and I didn't have my camera with me.

Had breakfast with the couple, Gaylord and Helga, from Vancouver Island that we met early in the cruise. He is a huge guy and presides at the table like a barrister that he once was. You never know if he is going to talk or not. She does most of it. The first time we met he said he gave up his "ticket" to take over and run the family farm that they are now selling off.

I had Texas French toast and LaRue had Swedish pancakes.

Went to the Mariner's lunch with the captain. We were at a table for two next to a table for four. Gayle and Dwight, the couple with the cabana, came in and joined us along with another couple they had met before. That lady was talking about losing her sign and sail card at the Guatemala port. LaRue found one in the restroom at the port and turned it in when we returned to the ship. Turns out it belonged to the Lady telling the story. Just three choices for lunch. I had chicken and sausage gumbo soup and Pasta Rasta. LaRue had a salad with chicken and fish. The only dessert was coconut pie. The Captain spoke briefly and we had a champagne toast.

Formal night for dinner. We were going to meet up with the cabana couple, but they didn't show. We could tell at lunch she was not feeling well, so it was not a surprise. She has been through a lot being a two time cancer survivor. At last lobster was on the menu. We both had the jumbo shrimp cocktail that was superb. I had chicken and broth soup and LaRue had a salad. We both had a filet mignon and lobster tail. For dessert we both had a warm non flour chocolate cake with berries and whipped cream that was good. We were talking to the maitre'd about the shrimp cocktail, and he wanted to bring us another one. We declined. It was a very good dinner.

### **Apr 29, Monday. At Sea**

During the night an announcement came on saying there was smoke detected somewhere in the low decks. I could not hear it all. Later another announcement for the crew. Later the Captain announced all was OK. It sure gets your attention and makes it hard to go back to sleep.

It was 62F and 86% humidity at 6:30am. Doing 19 knots and in 5,060 ft of water. Strong wind, but sea is good.

Breakfast in the main dining room at a table for two. LaRue had the English breakfast, and I had the ham and egg skillet. Must have been a half pound of diced ham chunks in it. I ate about a fourth of it. It's about the only entrée I have seen that is done in excess.



Last day, so it is the day to pack things up for debarkation tomorrow.

Had lunch in the dining room with a lady from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I had penne vodka and LaRue had Jamaican stew.

For dinner we both had a nice jumbo shrimp cocktail. Larue had calf liver, and a Sunday for dessert. I had NY strip steak and vanilla ice cream for dessert.

The ship and crew were excellent. The food was mostly good. The menu was a bit strange and lacking in entrée's that appealed to us. The itinerary was excellent and would do it again.

San Diego in the morning and that's all for this cruise. Thinking about Alaska for the next one.

The end

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