

12/25/23

**Mexican Riviera Cruise
Carnival Panorama
December 4-11, 2021**

December 3.

Meticulous and slow through security in Twin Falls for our Delta Connection flight to Salt Lake. Guess they don't have much to do with only one flight a day. They still hand search all checked bags even though they are xrayed.

We were eating lunch in the restaurant and security came in and informed a lady that the Bic lighter in her bag was not allowed. She could put it in her carryon. Seems strange to me.

The new terminal in Salt Lake is a pain. We deplaned out on the tarmac. Then bussed to the D concourse through a maze of temporary walkways that goes forever.

An attendant met us with a wheelchair for LaRue. Away we went through narrow metal walled walkways that connected through doors with security code access. We didn't know where we were going, and there were no other people around. We eventually got to ground level of B concourse and went up an elevator to gate B25. Our gate was B6 at the other end. It looked to be a mile. It reminded us of Paris and JFK for difficulty and distance. It was a tough connection for old people.

Nice flight to Long Beach as we were upgraded to Comfort class. Enjoyed the free cocktail after getting stressed out in Salt Lake. Had a long wait for a taxi in Long Beach airport as there were no taxis waiting. Most people were waiting on an Uber ride. The Uber quotes were \$59-\$70 to our hotel which is only three miles. I figured a metered taxi would be much less. The wait paid off as the fare was \$16.

Had a small pizza and salads at the small Italian restaurant adjacent

to the motel. Enjoyable and relaxing.

December 4

Our check in for the cruise was at noon. Ordered an Uber ride for 11:30am, as the quote was \$16.80 for 10 mile trip. We zipped right along then traffic came to a halt about a mile from the cruise terminal. It took about 30 minutes for the last mile. I felt bad for the driver as she was losing fares being tied up in traffic. I gave her a generous tip to ease the pain. If we had been in a taxi the meter would have been running the whole time we were stuck in traffic.

We had to wait a while for a wheelchair attendant for LaRue. By then the check in line was getting quite long just to get into the building. It seemed like it took forever with all the extra checking and paperwork for covid. However, we were on the ship by 1:30. A new wrinkle is that the life boat drill is done when you enter the ship. We were directed to our muster station and an attendant demonstrated the life vest and we were done. No assembling on deck for the drill before sailing. A major improvement, at least for Carnival.

All passengers must be vaccinated. A negative covid test within 48 hours, and masks are required. No more handy maps, newsletters, daily schedules, or menus. It is all done through your smart phone and the Carnival app.

Dining room access is requested through your cell phone App. You are notified when your table is ready, and the menu is through the app. You can get a printed menu, but it takes time, and is frowned upon.

The lido deck buffet operates about the same. You still serve yourself, which surprised us. There was even less evidence of hand sanitizers than before Covid. Social distancing is not required.

This is a new ship, very nice, and we like it. Larger than we like with a capacity of 4718. So far it does not seem crowded. We may be at 70% capacity, as that was the CDC mandate that cruise lines were to follow for returning to service.

The food stations on the Lido deck are laid out nicely with plenty of tables available. Even with the crunch of boarding passengers ready to have lunch. It was orderly and a chance to relax. We both grazed the salad bar and the American type food station.

The elevators have a new feature that is nice. You touch the deck # on a small screen for each person waiting and it shows you the elevator to wait for. You get on the elevator and get off on your floor. There is no dashing for whatever elevator that stops and there is always room. It is a great feature.

The first night dining was tense figuring out the system. We didn't know we were supposed to use the smart phone app to request seating before we got there. A greeter handled it for us, and escorted us to a table.

The dining room is not the elaborate gaudy décor common on most Carnival ships. It is rather plain in mostly white and light colored paneling.

We both had the shrimp cocktail appetizer. I then had a poblano and corn chowder, sweet and sour shrimp main course, and chocolate ice cream. LaRue had half of a roasted chicken main course, and some kind of crême pie. Nothing to rave about, but was ok. Had a good bottle of Columbia Crest Estates Merlot at a decent price for a cruise ship. The waiter, Sooksan from Thailand, was outstanding.

December 5 and at sea.

Up early and found 3 good decks for walking. Not many people out. Overcast with distant rain and about 65 degrees with a smooth sea.

We had coffee and Danish in the cabin and went to a late Sunday brunch in the dining room. We both had filet mignon and eggs that was excellent. The filet was better than any \$40 filet at home. Cooked perfectly on the rare side of medium rare. A complimentary mimosa went well with it. What a life.

By mid afternoon hunger was sitting in. Went up and had a Guy (Fieri) big bite burger. LaRue had a soft ice cream cone. Nice afternoon sailing along. Some white caps showing, but a smooth ride.

Formal dress up night. Our any time dining room is on aft deck 3 that is straight down from our cabin. There is additional dining on deck 4 that looks down on the deck 3 dining room. It looks quieter and less busy. However, there is no way on the App to request deck 4. We decided to act dumb and went to deck 4. People were standing around to be seated. LaRue got the attention of a greeter. He said no problem. He would get us a table and to come to him every night. He took us to a quiet section aft, and it was great.

We both started with the shrimp cocktail appetizer that we love. LaRue then had an oyster appetizer and I had Sicilian meat ball soup. We both had lobster tail for the main and it was excellent. Our waiter suggested a second lobster tail, and we went for it. We both finished with crême brulee for dessert. A bottle of Argentine Malbec was perfect with our meal. It was a great dinner ,and we were stuffed. A great day at sea and no need for entertainment this evening.

December 6 and at sea.

Clocks went forward last night. Sunny with a smooth sea and about 72 degrees when I went out walking. The sports deck is great for walking and has exersize stations that I tried and liked. It is now short pants and short sleeve shirt attire. No whale activity so far.

This morning on our way to Puerto Vallarta with arrival tomorrow morning. Everything great so far.

The only complaint is the TV or lack of it. There is no news or sports channels. It is all Carnival stuff, HGTV, Food channel, Travel channel, Discovery channel, and CBS which is all canned documentaries. We don't watch much TV. Not a great loss.

Being a sea day it is a brunch for breakfast, and or lunch, in the dining room. We had coffee in the room and went about 10am. Could have had the filet mignon again but decided to try something else. I hadhHuevos rancheros with a side of hash browns and

sausage. LaRue had a mushroom omelette and a side of brunch potatoes and bacon. We were stuffed. The waiter, Sooksan, that we had the first night saw us and came over to our table to say hello. These guys are amazing and super friendly. When they take your order they ask your name and remember it.

After a big breakfast brunch we grabbed hotdogs in the deli in the afternoon. Passed close by Cabo San Lucas and enjoyed the view. Walked around the ship and checked out everything. Went back to the cabin and read until sleep took over.

Had dinner in the deck 4 dining room and it was only about half full. Got a table for two in a side room near the back windows. Our waiter was Samporn. We both had the shrimp cocktail appetizer. I had an excellent chicken noodle soup and LaRue had escargot for a second appetizer. She had a lamb shank for the main and I gambled with the baked ziti. I lost on that choice, so did not eat much of it, We both had chocolate panacotta for dessert, which was great. Our wine was a California Layer Cake Cabernet that was good. Samporn said there are about 3100 passengers, and the capacity is 4700. The dining room was nearly empty when we left at 8:30.

Sailing along tonight and the ride is smooth as glass

December 7, Tuesday.

Pulled into Puerto Vallarta at 7am on a nice clear sunny day.

I got an early walk in and we went to the dining room for breakfast. It is a huge dining room and there were very few people. Everyone is getting off early to catch tours. There are 100's of tables. and we got the same table as the day before. We both a fruit plate to start and I had eggs benedict. LaRue had avocado toast and poached egg. We were both mesmerized by an older gentleman at the next table with a weird hat. He ordered prune juice, tomato juice, and orange juice. He then mixed them together and added tobasco sauce. He had a waffle with it.

I got off the boat at 10am and walked down the street to our old resort

to look it over. I got a beer in the market and went out to the Villa Del Mar pool. Pretty quiet with only about 20 people. I then went over to the Villa Del Palmar side, and it was quiet also. Did not see any waiters that we know in the restaurant, and no beach vendors on the beach that we know. There was one bellhop I recognized. By the time I got back to the ship I was hot and tired. I used to walk that route easily.

It is amazing that our first visit to PV was in April 1986. We ended up buying a timeshare and had a lot of buyers remorse. We have been back every year since, except for 2 years. One was when we traded for the Bahamas, and last year due to Covid. Several years we visited twice a year. Lots of memories, and we have seen lots of changes. Still love it.

We had planned to go to old town for lunch, but LaRue thought we should just get off and explore the new cruise terminal and shops. We got off and then decided to catch a taxi to old town, and have lunch at the Sea Monkey, which was the original plan. We had a nice driver and set it up with him to pick us up at 3:30. I had fish taco's, and LaRue had avocado stuffed with shrimp salad. Both were excellent.

LaRue was tired of walking and sat on a bench while I went down to the Burro Bar to see if my 10B Idaho license plates are still on the wall. They are still there, and I got a photo. The expiration tag on the plate is 02/2002.

We waited 25 minutes for our driver to show up, and he didn't. We flagged a taxi, which saved us 100 pesos.

The exchange rate is the best we have ever seen. Previous visits it was around 12 pesos per dollar. Today it was 19 pesos per dollar at the Sea Monkey, as well as the resort.

We were dragging by the time we made our way through the cruise terminal to the ship. The terminal is set up so that you have to pass by all of the shops to get to the ship. LaRue complained the whole way. My fitbit registered 16,563 steps equating to 7.9 miles for the day.

Before dinner we sat on our veranda with our drinks and enjoyed the view of downtown PV. We could see the top of our old resort and there was a lot to remember and think about. The temperature was about 77 degrees and fairly high humidity. Just the way I like it.

There was hardly anyone in the dining room for dinner. We had a great waiter that was a lot of fun. We both had the shrimp cocktail and iceberg lettuce for appetizers, and beef tenderloin, green beans, and braized potatoes for the main. The beef was outstanding. I have always said Carnival has the best beef of any cruise line. For dessert LaRue had grilled sweet and sour pineapple and a tropical fruit plate that we shared. I also had vanilla ice cream. It was a great dinner. Our wine was a bottle of Hess Vineyard Cabernet from Napa County, California. First time we have had it, and it was enjoyable.

Sail away was at 9pm and we sat on our verandah and enjoyed the lights of PV as we sailed away. It was a great evening.

December 8, Wednesday.

Pulled into Mazatlan around 9am. Sunny and nice at 77 degrees. Was out walking and looking for whales on the way in, but did not see any.

Had breakfast in the dining room with very few people. I had tomato juice, melon plate, a small waffle, 2 eggs, and 2 sausage links. LaRue had the melon plate and an omelet made to order. It was too hot to eat when she got it, so it was fresh off the grill. It was a good leisurely breakfast. We were seated by a port side window and watched tour bus after tour bus pull up to begin loading.

We were going to get off and catch the shuttle to the terminal and hang out at the cantina, but changed our mind. Will stay on the ship to minimize exposure to a lot of people. Quiet day aboard reading and looking around the ship.

For lunch I got a pastrami sandwich from the deli and a salad from the salad bar. LaRue grazed the American section in the buffet.

Too many food venues to check out. Some are extra cost but most are free. Got a couple slices of pepperoni pizza for a snack at 4:30, and it was good.

Sail a way was at 6:30pm in the dark. Went to dinner in the dining room and had the same area and waiters as last night. They were busier, so not as much interactive time as last night. We both had the shrimp cocktail appetizer as usual. Larue had a salad and grilled salmon. I had French onion soup and lasagna. Neither one of mine too great. LaRue had a fruit plate for dessert and I had apple pie and vanilla ice cream. She didn't request it but our waiter brought her the apple pie and ice cream also. Our wine for dinner was a bottle of Kendall Jackson Merlot from Santa Rosa, California.

The ship is jolting side to side a little tonight. Not annoying but you can feel it.

December 9, Thursday

I was up at 6:30am and we were already anchored in the bay in Cabo San Lucas. Tenders were arriving to take people off. Nice sunny morning and around 75 degrees. Got my walk in enjoying the view.

We went to the dining room for breakfast and had a nice table beside the aft windows. I had a banana, Spanish omelet, and a side of chicken sausage links. The omelet was a disaster. It had cold chopped tomatoes and red peppers on top. That was covered with a pile of cold grilled cilantro. So much for that. LaRue had a banana, salmon, bagel, and cream cheese.

Will stay on the ship today as tendering is no fun, and we have done Cabo many times.

The last tender back to the ship is 1:30 and we sail by 2:30.

We are invited to the Captain's cocktail party for Platinum and Diamond level cruisers at 4pm. After thinking about being in close proximity to people without masks we decided to skip it. No sense in risking it even though there seems to be no covid cases on the ship. At least we have not heard of any. I see on the internet news that a

Norwegian ship has had an outbreak, so that will set things back. We have a mask requirement except for eating and drinking, and on outside decks. I had a problem with the mask just after we boarded. I got a soft chocolate cone and on my way back to our table it started to drip. I tried to lick it with my mask on. I had a white mask with a big chocolate smudge on it.

We went to the extra charge Seafood Shack by the outside aft pool for lunch. LaRue had a huge bread bowl with clam chowder for \$4. I had fish and chips for \$6. Both choices were great. We had our first beer on board at \$6.50 each for Coors Light. At least it was 16 ounces. Had a very nice table looking out on the beach and resorts.

Current temperature is 82 degrees and feels more like 90. No whale activity. Guess they have not gotten here yet or went somewhere else.

Reading a great book on my e-reader about a B17 belly gunner in WW2. Very vivid description about his training and his 35 missions when the average life was 12-15 missions. The goal when he got to England was 25 missions. When he got close it was changed to 30 and then to 35. By the time he got to 25 most of his friends were dead. He explains in detail the procedures for getting out of the belly turret if it malfunctioned, or battle damaged, or they were shot down. Having just flown on a B-17 I can visualize it all. The belly gunner position in the B-17 and the B-24 has been acknowledged as the most deadly job in all of the military in WW2.

Elegant dress code for dinner tonight. Didn't any see any tux's, and very few suits. It was more like better casual. We ended up with the waiter we have had the last two nights per LaRue's request. He is crazy and entertaining. We both had the usual shrimp cocktail, four seasons salad, and a good filet mignon with mashed potatoes and green beans. For dessert we had grand marnier souffle. It is a cruise ship dessert we both like, but have not seen very often. Very good dinner.

Smooth ride tonight even though we have a high wind and small white caps.

December 10, Friday at sea.

Clock went back one hour last night. I thought I was getting up at 6:30 but after I got out on deck I saw it was 5:30. Cool 60 degrees this morning. Big cumulus clouds and very dark ahead. Got my coffee and went outside on the aft Lido deck where I go every morning. It is strange that nobody is ever out there. Nice to see the sun come up over the water. Passed between two huge rain storms while I was out walking.

Last day of the cruise, so will attend the debarkation talk this morning, and pack up later. Small whitecaps and cruising at 21 knots. A smooth ride with just a little motion.

Brunch in the dining room today. Went at 10am after coffee and muffins in the cabin. LaRue had the filet mignon and eggs again. I had 12 o'clock French toast to find out what it is, two eggs, and pork sausage links. The French toast was one piece about an inch thick and spongy soft like a cake. It was good.

Checked out debarkation at the guest relations desk rather than sit in a crowded theater presentation. Changed our priority early time to the last off the ship. We don't want to get to our hotel and sit around all day to check in. We will wait in an ice lounge three decks below us for wheelchair assistance for LaRue. She could make it walking, but doesn't want to. We will still be off early, as 10am is the goal for everyone to be off the ship. We shall see.

Quiet afternoon reading and packing. Went up to the Lido deck at 2:30 to get something to eat. Nice that our cabin is 2 decks up to the lido deck buffet and the dining room is 4 decks below us. Very little walking required for LaRue. I had a Guy's burger and LaRue went through the salad bar. A little ice cream finished us off.

Went to dinner at 7pm in the dining room and had our usual waiter team. We both had fried shrimp and a Cobb salad for appetizers. LaRue had short ribs and I had penne mariscos for the main. The penne mariscos had shrimp, mussels, and calamari in a light tomato cream sauce. Not bad but not great. LaRue had fruit plate and I had chocolate ice cream for dessert. Our wine was a bottle of Mondavi

Woodbridge Cabernet that was the last of the two we were allowed to bring on board.

December 11, Saturday and debarkation

Went to the main dining room for breakfast at 7:30. We had not docked yet so looks like things are behind schedule a bit. Not many people in the dining room, so it was quiet and we had a leisurely breakfast. I had tomato juice with tabasco, coffee. French toast, 2 eggs, and 2 pork sausage links. LaRue had coffee, crossants, made to order omelet and 2 chicken sausage links. The assistant dining room stewardess, Agnes, came by several times to acknowledge us and walked us out when we left. We met her the first night of the cruise and she came by our table every night. Her job is to circulate around and talk to people. Agnes was great.

Cabins had to be vacated by 9am so we went up to the aft lido deck 10 and sat outside. We were parked in front of the old Queen Mary, so I took some pictures as she may not be there much longer. She is in bad disrepair and is no longer a hotel. Sounds like she may be sunk as renovation or salvage is too expensive. Glad we stayed on her a few years back. Hate to see her go as we are the same age. Both born in 1936.

The first call for debarkation was 9:30 for self carry luggage and that took a while. The regular debarkation started well after 10am. We were in the last group and off the ship at 11am. It seemed slow but the process was well organized and orderly. We were in no hurry. Had to wait about 15 minutes for a taxi. We were at the motel at noon, but a room wouldn't be ready for about an hour, so we went to the little Italian place for lunch. Was able check in when we got back.

I checked in online with Delta and happy to see we had been upgraded to first class to Salt Lake. Not much benefit on a 7am flight but the nice seats, better snacks, and status helps.

This wraps up the cruise which was very nice and no covid as far as we know.