

What to Expect On A Very Merrytime Cruise on the Disney Wonder: A Disney Cruise Line Review

by Amy Wear, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Shortly after we booked a relatively last-minute early November cruise on the Disney Wonder out of Galveston, we were pleasantly surprised to see that it would be the first Very Merrytime sailing of the season. This added a new dimension of excitement for our girls, as I read to them the anticipated Holiday themed events that would take place. A few weeks later, I truly was like a kid at Christmas getting our red Disney cruise booklet in the mail.

As we boarded the ship, we observed cast members frantically putting up the enormous Christmas tree and other holiday decorations in the atrium. Panama Canal cruisers had just disembarked the ship that morning, after all, from a 14-day Halloween on the High Seas cruise out of San Diego. Within an hour, the ship was fully transformed into holiday mode.

□ The decorations throughout the ship were not overdone by Disney standards. Most of it was concentrated in the atrium area, other than some decorations in the ship's three main restaurants.

□ On our first day, Christmas music was being played at a low level in some areas of the ship. After that we only heard Christmas music at brief intervals and there were several days I don't recall hearing anything but Disney or mainstream music.

As for the characters' attire, their clothing changed with the theme each day. They wore their holiday best for some of the special Very Merrytime events, but otherwise would be dressed for the theme of the day such as pirate outfits for pirate night and Mexican clothing for our day in Cozumel. Cast members also got festive, wearing Santa hats during Holiday themed events.

□ We didn't expect to see (and smell!) the life size gingerbread house at guest services, as Disney's marketing had clearly indicated that the gingerbread houses wouldn't be constructed until later Very Merrytime sailings. But there it was, fully assembled, when we boarded the ship.

□ As you might expect, Very Merrytime t-shirts, mugs, and other Holiday themed merchandise could be found in the gift shops. We enjoyed seeing the traditional Disney Parks and Disney Cruise themed

ornaments, which make for such a nice trip keepsake. There was also a small assortment of Disney Parks packaged treats, but noticeably absent were my favourite frosted pretzels.

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□The kick-off event to the Very Merrytime cruise was the lighting of the Christmas tree and singing of Christmas carols with the characters dressed up for the holidays. We didn't get a great view because we arrived just before it was about to start. We were on the early seating and found that we had to rush our dinner or skip dessert in order to get a good spot for some of these between seating events and photo-ops.

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□The following night at 10:15pm featured a very special event called Santa's Winter Wonderland Ball, featuring the Cruise Director and the Holiday Snowbells welcoming the arrival of Santa Claus. We unfortunately could not attend, as it was too early in the cruise for our girls to manage staying up that late and, having traveled from Atlantic Canada, we were adjusting to a 2-hour time zone difference. Accounts from others who attended were that this was a truly magical event.

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□On day six, our family got to participate in a gingerbread making class lead by Chef Vivek, who was responsible for baking the entire gingerbread house at guest services. I suspect that with so many days at sea on the previous Panama Canal sailing, he got a head start on the gingerbread house; hence why we were so lucky to get to see it on the first Very Merrytime sailing. Our girls thoroughly enjoyed making the gingerbread house and equally enjoyed devouring it back in our cabin!

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□Some other Very Merrytime events included visits with Santa and Holiday Storytellers. We missed the Holiday Storytellers event, where crew members shared how they celebrate Hannukkah and Kwanzaa. There were about three opportunities to visit with Santa, but our girls were too busy having fun doing other things to catch his appearances.

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□On our last day of sea, we enjoyed Storytime with Mrs. Claus. She had an unexpected surprise, where the Fab 5 appeared in their holiday sweaters. It was a very rare free-for-all, where the children were allowed to just mingle about and go up and hug the characters while the parents snapped photos.

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□While Disney Cruise Line's marketing material gave many examples of holiday themed crafts and activities that would be taking place in the kids' clubs, our girls didn't experience this during their visits to Oceaneer's Lab and Oceaneer's Club. Again, I suspect that those types of activities get into full swing in later sailings.

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□Our sailing did not include a visit to Castaway Cay, but most of the

Very Merrytime sailings do. The island is said to be well decked out with a Christmas tree, Mr. and Mrs. Snowman, and many other Christmas decorations and holiday touches.

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□The final Very Merrytime event was 'Til We Meet Again: A Merry Farewell. Once again this event was too late at night for our family. It was described in our Personal Navigator as, "A final chance to come together with your Disney friends and Merrytime cruisers. The children are all invited to the stairs to perform their own candlelight magic. Hugs, Photos, and joy will prevail!"

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□With any luck, our family will get to experience another Very Merrytime sailing next year. I will be sure to report back on all of the events and any changes.

About The Author: Amy Wear is a work at home mom, travel agent, writer, and registered occupational therapist. She lives in New Brunswick, Canada, and specializes in planning magical vacations for people of all abilities at Click The Mouse. You can find her online at <http://www.clickthemouse.ca/amy-w.html>

Article last updated: 12-10-2015

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<http://www.passporter.com/articles/dcl-very-merrytime-cruise.html>

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