

Top Five Favorite Things About Disney Cruise Line (Part 1 of 2): A Disney Cruise Line Planning Article

by Tim Harrison, PassPorter Guest Contributor

My wife, Sharon, and I have experienced four cruises aboard Disney Cruise Line, and have loved every one of them! We sailed twice aboard the Disney Wonder before the refurbishment, and twice aboard the Disney Fantasy. Our most recent cruise was in March 2017 aboard the Disney Fantasy: the 7-night Western Caribbean cruise.

□ Like most travelers, there are things we loved and things we wished we could have changed (or, at least, tweaked a bit). Based on those experiences, here are my five favorite things about Disney Cruise Line. (My five LEAST favorite things about Disney Cruise Line will be in next week's issue!)

My Five Favorite Things about Disney Cruise Line (in reverse order):

□ 5. The Disney Cruise Line terminal and boarding. For us, the Disney cruise experience begins with arrival at the Disney cruise terminal and boarding the ship. The entire process heightens our anticipation. We arrive at the terminal early, hand off our bags to the Disney Cruise Line personnel, and then get in line to enter the terminal. This gives us an opportunity to talk to our fellow cruisers. Then, before you know it, we enter the Disney Cruise Line terminal, check in for our cruise, have our picture taken with Captain Mickey, and step outside for our first up close look at the ship. Usually they are still loading the food and other items. We also spend time learning our dining rotation, which is printed on our Key to the World card. (The Key to the World card is your "ticket" to board and exit the ship, your room key, and a way to charge purchases if a credit card has been linked to your stateroom. If you are a first-time cruiser, you may want to purchase a lanyard to wear so your Key to the World card is handy when needed.) Soon, our boarding number is called and we move through the Mickey door and down the rampart to the ship, where we are announced by one of the cruise members: "Disney Cruise Line welcomes the Harrison family!" It was very thrilling the first time we heard that welcome.

□ 4. Tours and other free entertainment aboard the ship. In addition to the obvious forms of entertainment aboard the ship, Disney Cruise Line also offers a variety of other free things to do in the form of tours and entertainment. You can learn what is available each day via your Personal Navigator, the Disney Cruise Line schedule of events given to

you each day. (You can also download the Disney Cruise Line Navigator App onto your iOS or Android device.) We enjoyed the walking tour of the ship, the Senses Spa open house, and the Art of the Theme Show Tour (highlighting the design, Imagineering, and artistry of the ship). Other events throughout the cruise include trivia shows, shopping seminars, drawing classes, crafts, and much more. There is also the Midship Detective Agency, an interactive experience where you help Mickey (or the Muppets, depending on which ship you are on) solve a mystery by visiting various pieces of enchanted artwork around the ship. Even though this is billed as a kid's game, many adults play, too. A word of warning, though. Following the clues will take you to every deck aboard the ship and run you from foreword to aft and back again! It is a great way to have fun, see the enchanted art, and learn the ship, all at the same time.

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□3. Character interaction. If you are interested in meeting Disney characters with a minimum of wait time, the Disney cruise is the perfect venue. Not only can you meet your favorite characters at scheduled times and places (published in your Personal Navigator each day), but you also have a good chance of meeting them walking around the ship or at Castaway Cay! On our first cruise my wife and I rode the ship's elevator with Peter Pan and Wendy. On another cruise Captain Jack Sparrow came walking down the beach and stopped to talk. We also saw Imperial Storm Troopers (we were on a Star Wars Day at Sea cruise), and while waiting in line for a picture with Mickey, Cinderella walked by and we had our picture taken with her. Pluto also came walking by the pool one afternoon and stopped for photos. Needless to say, if you have children who want to meet lots of Disney characters, a cruise is just the place to do so!

2. Palo. While the normal rotational dining is great, my wife and I share a fondness for Palo, the adult-only restaurant found on all four ships of the Disney Cruise Line. Palo is Italian-themed and serves meals for dinner and, on cruises that are 4-nights or longer, for brunch. Reservations are required and there is an additional cost of \$30 per adult (not including tip or alcohol). However, in my opinion, Palo is well worth the extra expense! My wife and I have experienced both brunch and dinner. We really enjoyed both, but give a slight edge to brunch. If you chose to dine during the dinner hour you will have to miss your normal rotational dining for that evening (though you can have the chocolate souffle with vanilla bean gelato for dessert). On the other hand, if you dine at brunch, you can enjoy an amazing meal (featuring both buffet and a selection off the menu) without missing out on your rotational dining experience. For us, dining at Palo is a must! We actually prefer it to Remy.

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□1. The stage shows. The live shows in the Walt Disney Theatre are phenomenal! They justly deserve all the hype they get. On our last cruise aboard the Disney Fantasy we enjoyed "Disney's Aladdin - A Musical Spectacular". Whoever played the role of Genie was hilarious! We also enjoyed several other live productions, such as "A Fantasy Come True" and "Disney Wishes". The other Disney ships have equally impressive stage productions. The Disney Dream presently has "Beauty and the Beast," the Disney Magic has "Tangled: The Musical," and the Disney Wonder has "Frozen, A Musical Spectacular." In addition to the plays, there may also be other artists performing. One evening the entertainment was a hypnotist, Ricky Kalmon, and another evening we saw juggler/comedian Charles Peachock, who had appeared on America's Got Talent. While other cruise lines also have great food and wonderful accommodations, Disney Cruise Line tops them all when it comes to entertainment!

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□Next Week - My Top Five Least Favorite Things About a Disney Cruise!

About The Author: Tim Harrison has been a fan of all things Disney since visiting Magic Kingdom in 1972. He is a part-time Disney travel planner at Vacation Guru and a full-time assistant professor at Southwest Tennessee Community College.

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