

Spa Carnival: Splurge at Sea

by Terry Dagdagan, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Imagine lying face down beneath a warm towel on a cushioned table, with soothing music playing in the background and the scent of lavender and chamomile permeating the room. A gentle tap is heard on the door. Someone calls you by name and asks if you are ready. This is the beginning of your experience at Spa Carnival on the Carnival Elation cruise ship out of San Diego.

Having researched massages and treatments online at Carnival.com before our cruise, my husband and I knew we wanted a couple's massage. This is basically a room with two tables where both people can enjoy treatments simultaneously. Online, Carnival offered 50-minute treatments that cost between \$269 and \$290 per couple. The 75-minute and 100-minute couples treatments cost between \$390 and \$398. We chose to heed the advice of friends and wait until we got on board to book our spa experience. We were not disappointed!

The first thing to do after boarding the ship and eating the requisite buffet lunch is take a tour of the spa facility. If you are not sure what type of massage or treatment you want or have questions, this is the best way to begin. My husband has always been fascinated with the Hot Stone Massage, while I was leaning more toward a Swedish massage. We left the spa with a menu of treatments and massages that were the same prices as online.

There was one special offered immediately. This was a Teen Pamper Night for the third night of the cruise. It was for girls 10 to 17 years old and cost \$49 per girl. We signed up our two daughters (ages 12 and 14) and they ended up having a great time (which could get expensive in the future). I did not have to be present for them to participate, just sign a waiver and pay the bill.

The Teen Pamper Night was offered at 6:00 pm and 8:00 pm and lasted about 1-1/4 hours. The girls are asked to wear swim suits since they use the sauna and steam rooms as part of the treatment. Their special time begins with an energizing and fruity facial, followed by a revitalizing eye zone treatment. While there aren't many wrinkles to be zapped at this age, late nights at the kids club did result in some bags under the eyes.

Next step is a spell in the steam room, where they are given moisturizer to slather on, and then a shower. Once this is done a hair conditioning treatment is applied, followed by a relaxing scalp massage. The final step is a few minutes in the sauna before they are sent on their way.

This was definitely the highlight of both our daughters' cruise and well worth the money. The second morning of the cruise we adults found our perfect treatment -- a 75-minute Top 2 Toe special for \$139 each. We could even do this as a couples treatment. It consisted of a full body Swedish massage and spa facial, with complimentary scalp, foot and ankle massages.

When we showed up for our appointment, we were greeted by name and shown into a comfortable waiting room to enjoy ice water or hot tea. We did this while filling out waivers and health concern forms identifying items we'd like the masseuse to focus on during treatment. Much to my husband's delight we were then greeted by our masseuses, Nympha and Rochelle (not a mustachioed Helga with rippling muscles that would shame a professional body builder).

Both of our masseuses were very in tune with our needs and constantly checked throughout the massage to make sure the pressure was just right and never became uncomfortable. The treatment ends with a scalp massage. A quiet chime is sounded to signal the end of the treatment. Nympha and Rochelle stepped out to give us a few minutes to relax and get dressed. They returned ten minutes later with a cold glass of water for each of us.

After our water we were nudged back into reality as we were presented with the bill for signature. It is refreshing to see that a tip is not automatically added on like so many other services on the ship. This way you can tip according to the service given, which in this case was excellent!

Another bonus of booking on the ship, as opposed to before the cruise, is the additional specials offered to repeat customers. My husband had mentioned to Rochelle that he wanted to try the Aroma Hot Stone Massage. The spa offered us a 55-minute Aroma Hot Stone Massage for \$99 each, and we were able to also schedule this as a couples massage. This massage is usually offered for \$149 per person, so this was a huge savings for us. An additional bonus is that we were able to schedule it with the same masseuses.

Two days later when we showed up for our appointment we were warmly greeted by Nympha and Rochelle and led to the same room. The hot stones are first placed at points on the back on top of the towels, while the masseuse begins the massage. Throughout the 55 minutes the stones are incorporated into the massage with warm, aromatic oils, as well as placed directly on the skin as you grow accustomed to them.

I went into this treatment with a fear of having scorching rocks placed

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on my body accompanied by the smell of burning flesh. I was happily surprised that this was not the case! The use of the hot stones is very soothing, especially with the warm oils. Every part of your body from the fingers to the toes is massaged and soothed.

Treatment ends the same way with the sound of a tiny chime signaling it is over. Knowing that this is coming, I was a little on edge expecting it to finish all too soon. Happily, with both treatments, it is just the right length of time. Some of the nitty-gritty about the spa treatments is to be sure to allow yourself plenty of time to get back, if you schedule one on a shore day. There is a 50% cancellation fee if you cancel on less than 24 hours notice.

Every day presents a list of different specials offered at the spa. Spa Carnival is also a full service salon. Hair and nail services are offered, including manicures and pedicures and various types of shaves for men. The last two days of the cruise offered some wonderful salon treatment packages to choose from ranging from \$75 for a Formal Night Special up to \$180 for hair coloring.

If you like to relax on your cruise (and who doesn't!) this is the way to go. As with any cruise, sign and sail accounts can creep up on you. Just keep track of your spending and stick to your budget. We don't normally take shore excursions ourselves, so this was our pre-planned splurge for the trip. It was worth every penny! Spa Carnival offered something for everyone in our family, and we were not disappointed.

About The Author: Terry Dagdagan is an occasional contributor to the PassPorter Newsletter. She and her family have been DVC members since 2000. They are looking forward to a Walt Disney World trip this summer and a cruise on the new Disney Dream in June 2011.

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