

Disney Cruise Line West Coast Cruises: Breezing Through Debarkation on the Disney Wonder

by Terry Dagdagan, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Your cruise is over. Happy memories wash over you like the warm sun on a beach in Cabo San Lucas.

Then the mere thought of debarkation day hassles causes your tan to fade a shade or two (insert the horror music from "Psycho" here). Dragging your luggage to breakfast, waiting out your turn to get off the ship, and going through Customs. It can all be very daunting.

Relax. It doesn't have to be that way. There are always options to make this process much easier. We discovered some wonderful little extras on the last day of our 10-night cruise to Mexico out of Los Angeles on the Disney Wonder. As long as you are not one of those vacationers that believe now that the trip is over, you must be off the ship and racing along your way, these tidbits could be for you.

□ As always, our cruise was fantastic! This being the completion of our fourth cruise with Disney Cruise Line (DCL), we were bracing ourselves for what lay ahead on the final morning rush. To our delight, we tripped across a few Disney extras that we missed on our previous three cruises.

□ Being early risers, my husband and I were up and dressed by 6:00 a.m. Taking advantage of the 24-hour beverage station on Deck 9, we grabbed our morning coffee. From atop Deck 10 we watched as the Wonder made its final pass through the waterways of the harbor in San Pedro. If you have never taken advantage of watching the ship pull in and dock, it is quite a peaceful way to begin your morning. This was the one gem we already knew about.

While on our way back to our cabin to hurry our teenagers along, we made a new discovery. Despite the Beach Blanket Buffet, located on Deck 9 by the aft elevators, saying that it would open at 7:45 a.m., it was actually open for breakfast at 7:00 a.m.

□ Usually we follow DCL's dining plan of having breakfast in the same restaurant that we had dinner at the night before. As we were in the first dinner seating, our scheduled breakfast was at 7:30 a.m., and we'd have to drag our carry-off luggage with us, since DCL requests that all passengers be out of their cabins by 8:00 a.m.

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□ Seeing this golden opportunity, we rounded up the kids and decided to hit the buffet for breakfast. It was the same fare as always, with the added convenience of the restaurant not being very crowded. This gave us time to enjoy breakfast and still go back to our cabin to freshen up before gathering our bags and departing for good. By the time we were finished eating, it was close to the advertised opening time for the buffet, and the lines were forming.

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□ The next step is to basically sit around and wait somewhere else in the ship until your debarkation group is called. The day before everyone receives luggage tags with a Disney character and color on the tag. These get attached to your luggage that you place outside the cabin before 10:45 p.m. that night. (Remember you won't see this luggage again until you are off the ship.) These tags are also the group you are in when being called for debarkation. Your room steward leaves an extra tag for you to keep, so you don't forget which group you are in. DCL thinks of everything!

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□ Of course, it is drilled into you to make sure you keep an outfit to walk off the ship in the next morning. Honestly, I did not notice one passenger wearing pajamas or an outfit fashioned out of their cabin pillow cases or towels. We must have had very obedient shipmates.

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□ On other cruises we sat in a crowded lounge close to the debarkation area waiting (most times almost two hours) until the crew called our group. Thinking this might happen again, we chose a calm spot up on Deck 9 where we could enjoy the beautiful California weather. The beverage station is always open on that deck too, so we were well supplied.

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□ To my children's delight the ping pong and foosball tables were available for use. Sometimes during the cruise they were too busy to use, especially on at-sea days. This was a great way to keep the family entertained.

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□ One more bonus was that the entertainment crew took advantage of the empty stage at the Goofy Pool to rehearse. Those of us on deck got front row seats to the show. There was Chip and Dale, Goofy, pirates, dancers, and singers. We even caught a glimpse of Captain Jack Sparrow.

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□ It turns out we were in the last debarkation group called. As we gathered our belongings and headed for the exit ramp, we all decided that this was the most restful debarkation we had ever been through. It's amazing what a little change in plan from the normal process can do

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for your disposition.

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□ One last hint I would recommend regards collecting your luggage. As you finally get off the ship and are led to the great hall where your luggage is waiting, don't forget to secure a porter. All baggage is grouped by your character so it is easy to find, but the porter line is immediately as you enter the hall. Have one person wait in line to get a porter while the rest make their way to the right area and locate your luggage.

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□ This makes transporting your luggage all the way through the Customs line a breeze. Despite the long lines, Customs moves quite quickly and you are out of there and on your way in no time. Don't forget to tip those hardworking folks toting your bags, especially since they are probably heavier than when you started!

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□ Out of all of our cruises, this debarkation was the most enjoyable. Remember, it only takes a little deviation from the process to make the difference between a harried end to your cruise, or a bit of last minute magic.

About The Author: Terry Dagdagan and her family have been DVC members since 2000 and are looking forward to becoming Gold Castaway Club members after their fifth DCL cruise on the Disney Dream in June 2012.

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