

Dover to Barcelona: Disney Cruise Line Repositioning Cruise Review

by Sabine Rautenberg, PassPorter Guest Contributor

My husband and I are avid Disney cruisers, but we live in Germany. That's why, usually, we have a long-distance flight ahead of us before we can enjoy the amenities aboard a Disney cruise ship. So when Disney Cruise Line announced the return of the Disney Magic to Europe in the summer of 2010, we were over the moon!

Since we found an unbeatable deal on the 8-night Dover to Barcelona repositioning cruise, we were immediately sold. We even convinced my parents to join us! So on July 30, 2010, the four of us hopped on a plane to London Heathrow. We're only a short 1-hour flight away from London -- a nice change from our usual 9-hour flight to Florida. To get from London to the port of Dover, I had booked a private shuttle service that was both quick and convenient. I must admit that seeing the Disney Magic docked in the south of England felt a big surreal at first, as we'd only ever boarded the ship in Port Canaveral before. The fact that, unlike in balmy Florida, temperatures here were in the low 50s didn't exactly help either. However, Disney Cruise Line did a marvelous job of bringing the special Disney magic to the port's otherwise dull terminal 2.

Soon we heard our family's name announced as we stepped onto the Magic, a surefire sign that our long-awaited Disney cruise was about to begin. As the ship pulled away a couple hours later, we had a panoramic view of Dover's magnificent White Cliffs.

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□ The first port of call on this special itinerary was Cherbourg in Normandy, France. None of the port excursions offered had caught our attention, so we ventured out on our own. Right by the cruise terminal is the free Cite de la Mer maritime museum that has the largest submarine open to the public anywhere in the world on display. After looking around the museum, we were pleased to find that free shuttle bus transportation was offered to take us into the town center and back. We explored this quintessentially French town on foot, stocked up on French wine, and finally made our way back onto the ship. This was only the second time one of the Disney cruise ships had ever docked here. So when the ship left the port, there was quite a crowd to send us off. In fact, so many people had gathered to watch us depart that Minnie decided to do an impromptu dance routine at the bow of the ship! It was quite a spectacle.

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□ The following day was a day at sea, and as on any Disney cruise, we took advantage of the adult pool. We were well on our way along the Spanish coastline, and while our location on the Atlantic Ocean made for a slightly more rocky journey, the sun got stronger with every hour we were sailing. On August 2, then, we reached Vigo, a Spanish town close to the Portuguese boarder. Once again, we chose to explore on our own. The city is built on, shall we say, hilly terrain -- meaning that we had quite a hike ahead of us if we wanted to see anything. Luckily, the Casco Vello, Vigo's historic center, was worth the climb. As a bonus, we were rewarded with a bird's eye view of the Magic docked down below.

Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, awaited us the following day. We were up early enough to witness a beautiful sunrise as our ship slowly sailed along the Tagus River to reach our destination for the day. I have to admit that I was stunned by how much the 25 de Abril Bridge that crosses over the Tagus River near Lisbon resembles the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. I later found out that it was actually built by the same company that built the San Francisco -- Oakland Bay Bridge. The city of Lisbon has so much to offer that we felt we barely scratched the surface in the few hours we were there. Despite an abundance of majestic historic buildings, it's really the narrow cobblestone streets and little arts and crafts shops on street corners that give the city its unmistakable atmosphere.

□ The next day brought us to Cadiz, a southern Spanish seaport that's a popular port of call for cruise ships. On that day alone, four other large cruise ships were docked alongside the Disney Magic, including the Celebrity Eclipse. Cadiz itself is a nice enough town but doesn't have any must-see sights. Disney did offer an excursion to Seville, Spain's fourth-largest city, that I had looked into but in the end decided against since it was a two-hour bus drive each way.

□ The last port of call, and my personal highlight of the cruise, was Gibraltar. Located by the southernmost tip of the Iberian peninsula, this British overseas territory is well worth a visit. The Rock of Gibraltar is argueably its best-known landmark. On a clear day, you can see the coast of Africa from the top. We opted for a guided van tour that took us into the Upper Rock Nature Reserve. Main sights there are the stalactite St. Michael's Caves where there's even a concert hall, and the Great Siege Tunnels that were used during World War II. Along the way, we had the chance to get up close and personal with Barbary Apes, the only wild apes on the entire European continent.

□ Lastly, on August 7, our arrival in Barcelona marked the end of an extraordinary cruise. Barcelona, of course, is a vacation destination in

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itself. Luckily, it seems to be Disney's European home port of choice, giving cruisers a chance to spend an extra day or two there before or after the cruise. I am very glad that this 8-night repositioning cruise gave us the opportunity to visit places I don't think we'd ever have traveled to otherwise.

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