

Saying 'Howdy!' to a New Home Port in Galveston: Disney Cruise Line Review

by Lorelei Ketcherside, PassPorter Guest Contributor

When Disney Cruise Line announced new itineraries based out of Galveston, I squealed, danced around the house, and signed on the dotted line.

There's a chance to sail my favorite ships, without airfare? Of course I will be there!

The Disney Magic's arrival in Texas started with fall 2012 sailings and continues into the 2013 itineraries. This expansion of home ports to include Miami, Galveston, and New York meant lots of new opportunities and a chance for many people to experience Disney in their own backyard. Marketing campaigns, local news broadcasts, posters in the malls, and general excitement prevailed among me and my fellow Texan Disney-philes. Then reality set in.

□ Planning a cruise may seem daunting in the best of situations. When you add in the unknowns of a new itinerary and a new home port, even the most pixie-dusted trip planner may develop a case of cold feet. So I turned to my trusty laptop and went into research mode. How to get there? Where to park? Would it be different than Port Canaveral? I gamely dove into this new adventure.

□ On our November sailing on the Magic, the cruise director said that more than seventy-five percent of all cruisers were Texans. Unlike my previous cruises out of Port Canaveral, most fellow cruisers sailed for their first time with Disney. On the positive side, I booked pretty nearly any excursion or dining reservation I wanted!

Unlike cruises from Port Canaveral, most cruisers drove to the port rather than flying or using DCL transfers. Galveston puts most of Texas under a day's drive to port, along with Louisiana and much of the rest of the south. Galveston, as it is an island, offers only a few options for driving directions, regardless of where you start your journey.

□ Those arriving from the north and west like us drive along Interstate 45, heading south. Once you cross the bridge onto Galveston Island, take exit 1C left onto Harborside Drive, turn left onto Kempner and you'll approach the lovely sight of the Disney Magic in port. Those arriving from the east head west along state highway 87 and ride the Port Bolivar Ferry. It takes around 20 minutes to ferry to the island and around 10 minutes for loading and unloading. Once ashore, you

continue to your right on Harborside Drive. Kempner and the cruise terminal lie to the right. You finally arrive at Cruise Terminal 2 to embark on your adventure. But don't expect to park here. There's drive-through access to drop-off and pick-up passengers and baggage, only steps outside of the terminal, but the port parking is a bit of a hike (or a shuttle ride).

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□ Thankfully, research prevails. Not one to be caught off guard, we reserved off-site parking ahead of time, and prepaid for a savings. Since there are several other cruise lines based in Galveston, sometimes getting a space in an off-site lot can be difficult. Pre-booking saves you the headache of driving from lot to lot on the date of departure. We drove to our nearby lot by following the bright orange signage for EZ Cruise.

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□ If you like choices, you're in luck. Between the official port parking at 33rd and Harborside Drive, the many off-site parking lots, and several Galveston hotels that offer cruise parking packages, almost anyone can find a parking solution that works for them. Whichever you pick, a shuttle will whisk you and your bags to the terminal. Much like in Port Canaveral, helpful porters wait to assist you once you're at the terminal.

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□ If you arrive before 10:30 am or so, there are a number of benches lining a wide, covered walkway along the street side of the terminal. Our youngest cruisers (and us as well) welcomed the sight of restrooms outside of the security clearance area. Much like on our previous cruises, security consisted of walk-through metal detectors and airport-type scanners for our carry-ons. Unlike Cape Canaveral, the terminal waiting area is on the same floor as security, so we pretty much could walk straight from the security scanner directly into a line to meet with Captain Mickey. We opted to collect our boarding paperwork and the kids' club wristbands first.

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□ Although it has been "Disney-ed up" a little, the overall feeling of the port and terminal leans toward the industrial and functional end of things. Don't expect giant Mickey ear funnels or soaring picture windows in the waiting area, but there are still plenty of Mickey-gloved cast members to high-five on your way up the gangway. The kids enjoyed the coloring pages near the kids club check-in desks. Concierge seating exists, but without a separate lounge.

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□ After the Family of the Day boards, the rest of us file down a hall for our pre-boarding family photos, and then we reach a stairwell, elevator, and escalator that go up to the actual gangway. A quick announcement and we're onboard and underway in the Lone Star State.

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□ A week of Magic flies by, and we're debarking all too soon. In a very nearly identical process to Port Canaveral, express debarking goes first. They carry their bags off the ship rather than leaving them outside their rooms the night before debarkation. This is rewarded with a slightly faster and earlier debarkation time. They carry off all their belongings and proceed directly through customs. The rest of us patiently file off the ship after a leisurely last meander about the ship. Once back in the terminal, we collect our bags either by ourselves, or with a porter's assistance and then head through customs. The mats on the gangway read a cheery "Welcome Home!"

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□ Happy sailing, y'all!

About The Author: Lorelei is a Christian, wife, mother of two, vegan, Texan, bookworm, and terrible-though-enthusiastic photographer. She sunburns indoors on a cloudy day, but still looks forward to her next Disney Cruise in spring of 2013!

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