

Castillo San Cristobal Walking Tour: Disney Cruise Line Port Adventure Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

When the Disney cruise shore excursions were first announced for our stop at San Juan, Puerto Rico, I knew what we'd be doing.

We wanted to do the [Fortifications Segway Guided Tour](#).

However, that tour only departed after lunch, and we'd be docking in port early in the morning, and I didn't want the day to go to waste, especially as San Juan was a place I never thought we'd visit in our lives. I had a look at the other shore excursions, but the majority of them would come back too late for our Segway tour. There was one however that caught my eye, the Castillo San Cristobal, A World Heritage Site -- Walking Tour.

□ A two-hour shore excursion, open to all ages, although recommended for those aged 10 and older, this tour takes you over to the Castillo, which overlooks the city. Sadly, on the day we arrived in port, the weather was not kind to us. We woke up to darkened skies, and before long, those skies opened, with torrential rain that set in for the whole morning.

□ Of course, this being Disney, they knew exactly what to do. Their first tactic was to hold us in the Buena Vista Theatre, where we were due to meet for the excursion, in the hope the rain would ease. Sadly, it didn't, and 40 minutes or so after our scheduled departure, we finally headed off the ship. Knowing that we would get drenched outside, free ponchos were waiting for us as we disembarked. We certainly needed them, as we splashed our way through the puddles to a spot under cover, where we were formally introduced to our guides for our tour.

At this point, we were divided into groups, and set off for the Castillo, which was only a five-minute walk. It was pleasant enough, although it was all uphill, and with the torrential rain, it was quite a struggle through the gushing water along the pavement.

□ When we got there, we learned more about the history of Castillo San Cristobal in the courtyard. I can imagine this section would be interesting for all ages, as there were costumed characters, and we were also asked to play our part as citizens of San Juan in defending the island from British attack. Once the call to arms had been read out by

the governor, we entered the Castillo, and blissfully under-cover heaven!

☐ Here, we visited various rooms, learning about the history and geography of Puerto Rico (I hadn't realized how close it is to South America!), how San Juan got its name, and how a castillo is different from a fort. Essentially, a fort just holds weapons, while a castillo also adds soldiers into the mix.

☐ We also met another of our guides, a woman who was in traditional dress, and explained how women used to communicate with the soldiers by using fans to signal their interest. As this was a family excursion (and there were a few children in our group), this was all very tastefully done!

☐ One room had a display of historic flags, and it was fascinating to see the changes, as more stars arrived to go with the stripes over the years. Another room was laid out to show how the soldiers would have lived, with uniforms on display. Once again, there was an excellent use of costumed characters to bring the story to life, as we learned how the uniforms differed to signify things like their nationality.

☐ There was also a display about how the Castillo was developed over the years, including a model of it. My only gripe was that I would have liked to have spent longer in here, but in fairness, we were able to return when the tour concluded, as we were left to make our own way back to the Fantasy.

☐ Our tour next took us to the rooftop of the Castillo, along a steep tunnel that was no fun in the wet. Despite warnings, there was one mishap, with one woman on our tour falling over, and I'm not surprised. That would explain why we all had to sign waivers at the start of the tour. From the rooftop, we got what would've been a superb view, had the weather cooperated with us. As it was, we could still see San Juan laid out beneath us, and the beautiful vista of the Fantasy berthed up beyond. With some blue sky, it would have been a picture postcard view, but you can't have everything.

☐ From the top of the structure, we headed down to the bottom, visiting the gunpowder room first, learning about the importance of keeping it cool, before we headed into the tunnels. Despite light from our guides, it was pretty dark and dingy in there, and I could see why the soldiers always stayed to the right of the tunnel. For starters, at least you had something to hold on to, and in the pitch black, it would be too easy to run into each other.

☐

□ The tunnels were, of course, home to the dungeons, and one captain imprisoned there made some pretty impressive drawings on the wall, which are still preserved today. When we emerged, our tour was done, and we were free to explore more of Castillo San Cristobal, which we did, before making our own way back to the Fantasy. It was an easy walk back, and it's not hard to find your way back to port. I also felt very safe as we walked along the streets, something I can't always say in the ports of calls for cruise ships. Previous stops in Italy and France spring to mind, with organized bag snatching gangs often around.

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□ I'm sure that you could explore the Castillo easily enough on your own, but this was a really fun and informative tour that explained all about its history, and significance. We came away, having learned a huge amount, and having enjoyed that experience. In that sense, it's a perfect shore excursion for Disney, echoing the very ethos they stand for.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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