

Cruising the Mediterranean

12-day Classic Mediterranean Cruise

Same itinerary as Mike's cruise!

Ship: NCL Jewel

Departure: June 2007

Itinerary: Istanbul to Barcelona

Istanbul. Athens. Venice. Rome. The names swirled through my mind as the plane flew eastward. Having read about these places I was finally going to see them.

After landing at the Istanbul Airport and getting our visa there- \$25US cash only-we got in our taxi to the Hotel Yasmak Sultan, two blocks from the Blue Mosque and Hagia Sofia. A late afternoon walk to see the Blue Mosque glowing in the late afternoon sun, dinner at the hotel with a view of the Bosphorus, followed by a good night's sleep.

The next morning we were out exploring the Blue Mosque built in 1616. My wife was given a wrap to cover her shoulders. The tile work in the mosque was beautiful. We crossed the street to Hagia Sofia, originally a Catholic Church built in the 6th century. Though in a state of restoration, the grandeur of the church stood out. From Hagia Sofia it was a short walk to the Grand Bazaar. Wandering the aisles of gold jewelry, spices, candy, clothing and rugs was a delight. Everyone wanted to practice their English and bargaining was the norm.

The next day we were off to Topkapi Palace. Spread over acres the highlights of the palace included the harem (har eem) the private area for the sultan and family. The treasury room included many of the jewels collected over centuries including the jeweled Topkapi Dagger. We sat and enjoyed hot tea while watching ships going up and down the Bosphorus.

The next day we boarded our ship and sailed. The food on board was delicious. Our cabin steward took good care of us and as the cruise days went by he started leaving towel animals for us including a rabbit wearing my sunglasses. The entertainment on board was top rate and the standing ovations at the end of the performances showed the audience appreciation.

Our first stop was Izmir in Turkey. Izmir, along with Kusadasi, are the gateways to the ancient city of Ephesus. We took a shore excursion since Ephesus is a 2 hour ride away. We stopped at a house where the Virgin Mary spent her last days on Earth and brought home holy water from a nearby spring. Arriving at Ephesus we were guided through the ruins. The front façade of the Celsus Library stood tall in the sun. I stood on the stage of the amphitheater where St Paul spoke to the Ephesians. People at the top of the amphitheater were able to easily hear me.

The next morning we docked in Athens. After a quick breakfast, we grabbed a taxi and headed off to the Acropolis. We got there, paid our admission, and headed up the slope. The Parthenon was covered in scaffolding as restoration work is going on. We wandered atop the Acropolis stopping at the museum, admiring the Caryatids, and enjoying the view. Descending the Acropolis I climbed the stone where St. Paul preached to the Greeks in AD51. We walked to the lower part of the Acropolis where we wandered the ancient streets of the Agora and stopped at the temple of Hephaestus. Leaving the grounds we stopped at Monastiraki Square for a lunch of Greek Salad and beer. After lunch we roamed the Monastiraki area and caught a train back to the ship.

With a sea day ahead of us we ate breakfast outside on the deck and then explored. A massage, art auction and lounging made for a relaxing day. When we arrived in Dubrovnik, we took a tender to shore and went to mass in an old church near the dock. Afterwards we wandered around the old town and we

took two hours to walk around the walls of the old city. Then it was time to shop a little and go back to the ship.

Cruising in to Venice was a gorgeous sight. Most shore excursions head to St. Mark's via the main shipping canal. We took a mile hike to the beginning of the Grand Canal and boarded a vaporetto for a ride down the busy Grand Canal. Getting off at University stop we walked to a farmers market selling fresh vegetables and fish. I watched a gondola filled with 17 people cross from one side of the canal to the other. We wandered till we got back to the Grand Canal and crossed the Rialto Bridge. Instead of heading to St. Marks we found the vaporetto going to Burano and Murano, other islands in the lagoon, famous for glass blowing and lace. Next day we walked to the Grand Canal and took a vaporetto to St. Marks and the Palace of the Doges. We explored St. Mark's square, had a coffee, shopped a little, bought a Venetian mask and then returned to the ship which left that afternoon. The view leaving Venice was just as spectacular.

The ship docked at the port of Civitavecchia, the port for Rome, which is about 2 hours away by bus. Most passengers were off to see the Vatican with St. Peter's and the Sistine Chapel. Others took a tour of the city while others took the Angels and Demons tour which spotlighted the places in the Dan Brown novel. We took a bus to town, got off at the Coliseum and wandered around stopping at various churches including Santa Maria Maggiore, San Giovanni Laterno and St. Pietro in Vincoli. The last was a major highlight as we got to see Michelangelo's statue, Moses. Back to the ship and one more sea day before making Barcelona our last port. The La Ramblas area was tourist oriented and enjoyable to walk around. Our reasonable priced hotel, the Monte Carlo, was on La Ramblas. We spent a day exploring and taking the tourist buses from which we saw the city highlights.

Heading home I could only think how much more of the Mediterranean there was to see. I know I am going back. **Now is the time to book your Mediterranean Cruise as Regal Travel is offering 2 amazing escorted Europe cruises.**

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- **10-day Gems of the Baltic Cruise** September 5, 2009 Copenhagen roundtrip Holland Eurodam

Call me and book your Mediterranean Cruise today. You can also visit me at Regal's Hilo office located at 1251 Kilauea Ave. Suite 240.

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