

Julie and I have cruised on the Disney Cruise Line (DCL) since they first sailed. Before Disney Cruise Line was founded, Disney had an arrangement with Premier Cruise Line (PCL) to allow its characters to appear on the Premier “Big Red Boats.” This arrangement ended, and Premier switched over to the Looney Toons and shortly thereafter PCL declared bankruptcy. Disney Cruise Line was later founded in 1995.

My children have enjoyed going on Disney cruises and now their children will have the same joys cruising around on what my grandson Calvin calls “the great big ship”. Next January, Calvin, his brother Henry and their cousin Logan will all be riding on “the great big ship”.

One of my recommendations regarding Disney has always been to never bring anyone to Disney before the age of six. Well, since I moved here to The Villages, I changed my mind on one of my rules. We have three grandsons all under the age of 5. We all visited Disney World this year and had a super time.

How did this story about Disney Cruise Line start? Well, I have invited, asked, discussed and talked about going on a Disney cruise with my friends. Does anyone know what their very comments always are? “Why does it cost so much?” And the second comment is, “too many kids will be running all over the place.”

Okay, I will answer the second comment first - that’s the Goofy in me.

During our cruises without our children, Julie and I have enjoyed every minute, and I mean every minute of every cruise. We board the ship, and only as Disney can do, we are treated like royalty with their first surprise. (It’s a surprise.) We head to the scrumptious buffet and eat shrimp, salad, desserts and more. We sit on the top deck and view Port Canaveral as we are ready to set sail.

I still haven’t bumped into any kids running under my feet. We go to our abandon ship drill and then off to the deck party only Disney can throw. Yep, we get to see some kids there. Jumping up and down, screaming with us old folks.



*Deck Party - Pirates Night - Aqua Duck water ride*

Then we’re off to get dressed for the show and dinner. The Disney entertainment is for all ages, as most of you may know. The second seating has mostly adults, but the magic still happens during the meal. After we eat, we go to the adult section of the Disney ship (Forward). This section is lively, quiet or loud, whichever you desire.

The next day we enjoy the pool, oh yes, there is an “adult only” pool.

Okay, what if I do bring kids? Can I see them if I WANT TO? Of course you can. You will get your own ‘wave’ phone in your stateroom when you check in. Call them anytime you want. And the cruise goes on.

Here’s a little history on the Disney cruise ships: The Disney Magic was the first ship sailing out of Port Canaveral on July 30, 1998. The Disney Wonder was launched on August 15, 1999. Disney Cruise Line later contracted with Meyer Werft shipyard in Germany to build two more ships. The first, the Disney Dream, was delivered in 2011. The second, the Disney Fantasy, was christened in 2012. And Disney announced that two more, yes, two more ships, are being built as we speak. The schedule calls for the new ships to be completed in 2021 and 2023. No names have been made yet for these ships.

Okay now for comment number one: “Why do they cost more than some other cruise lines?”

The one thing we all know is that Disney knows how to entertain and put on a show! And they do that with extremely high quality theatre shows that are performed on most evenings. The show themes are creative, obviously Disney themed, and very well executed, and the actual production with the special effects and the theatre techniques seem to give it that extra magic that you just don’t usually get aboard cruise ships. The other entertainment includes a sail away party, a pirate night, holiday-themed nights, a farewell party and you can’t forget the Fireworks at sea! My favorite entertaining act, Mike Super, the world famous illusionist, is often on board. You can even get your vows renewed.



*Dress up Pirates Night - Wedding Vows - Mike Super Magic & Illusion Show*

Disney Cruise Line also has special cruises only Disney could provide. That cruise I mentioned, the one my family is going on next year, is one of those special ones. Star Wars Day at Sea, a celebration of all things Star Wars, is a one-day extravaganza. For the remainder of your voyage, look forward to a fun-filled itinerary of entertainment and activities from Broadway-style shows and innovative dining to unforgettable Port Adventure excursions. Our two older grandchildren cannot wait to participate in Star Wars activities. No Calvin and Henry will have pictures with his heroes.

Here are the highlights of the Star Wars Day at Sea — Disney Caribbean cruise, you’ll be transported to “a galaxy far, far away” for an entire day of fun, including:

- A deck party featuring Star Wars Characters, music, dancing and fireworks
- Photo opportunities with Characters from across the Stars Wars universe
- An onboard version of the Jedi Training Academy, where young Palawan's learn lightsaber maneuvers
- Star Wars-themed games and activities at Disney's Oceaneer Club and Disney's Oceaneer Lab
- Stellar food and beverage offerings
- Screenings of the Star Wars films plus episodes of Disney's animated series Star Wars Rebels
- Exclusive themed merchandise

It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience that will thrill all the younglings, Palawan's and Jedi Masters in your family.



*Group Party - Disney Shows - Star Wars Characters*

When you go to one of the Disney Parks, they are always clean, attention is made to detail, and this is what we have all come to expect. The cruise ships have the Disney's signature touch and every inch of the ship has Tinker-bell's special touch by means of these clever ship features.

Here are just a few of the features that I see around the ship:

- The Midship Detective Agency — An interactive detective game that directs its participants to cleverly disguised works of art around the ship to help solve the mystery. This is a really fun and very unique game that has everyone, adults and kids alike, running around the ship trying to find clues in the artwork. I have never spent that long staring at the wall art on a ship before! Such a clever idea.
- The detail and backstory on the Aqua Duck water ride — There are duck footprints on the stairs and has a cute story revealing how Donald got stuck in the side of the forward funnel. All wonderfully detailed which makes it so much more than just a basic water ride. Aqua Duck is a water coaster (a water slide with similar turns, drops and g-forces as a roller coaster) that is located on the deck of two Disney cruise ships. It was first constructed on the Disney Dream in January 2011 and then later on the Disney Fantasy in February 2012. The Disney Magic has you in a starting position towering nearly 37 feet above the decks below. Brace yourself for the high-speed ride ahead as the floor beneath you fall away like a trap door. Then it's down the hatch! Plummet 212 feet through a translucent tube that twists and turns to an unforgettable splashdown.

- Large portholes — Certain public corridors have large portholes with built in seating. Clever use of the space, and instead of simply having windows there, they have created lovely idyllic and quiet spots to sit and watch the world sail by.

- The magical porthole — The magical porthole is found in the inside stateroom category and is something unique that makes an ordinary inside stateroom really special. This is a screen made to look like an actual porthole, and by means of a camera on the exterior of the ship, shows live video footage of what you would see if you had an outside or a verandah category stateroom. The magical part is the occasional appearance of a Disney character floating across the screen. A really fun feature that entertains and is a practical real time view of your port.



*Disney Ship - Large Portholes - Adult Pool*

- Wave phones – Disney’s answer to communication between families aboard the ship at no extra cost. Each stateroom has two wave phones that allows you to text and call without using your personal cell phone. You can call any shipboard phone, other wave phones and other staterooms. You can even use it on shore at Castaway Cay. These are really useful to have and make it easy to keep in contact with other members of your party. If you have children in any of the supervised facilities, nursery or the Oceaneer Clubs, you can be contacted if necessary.

- Hidden Mickey (HD) — HD is an all-time favorite in my family. One day of our cruise vacation will be devoted to finding as many HDs as possible. We will have our hands full on the Disney Fantasy. There are well over 200 on board. YEP, two hundred, just on board this one cruise ship.

- Navigator — Each day you will receive a copy of the navigator in your cabin. They will arrive by a secret messenger when you are out for dinner. I am still waiting to catch that person. Well, anyway, the navigator will give you all the events onboard the ship or in the port. There is even a Friends of Bill meeting every day. The navigator will list the places where you can get pictures with your favorite Disney Characters. The dress code for the day also will be listed. [Quick note on dress code: the specialty dining rooms, Palo and Remy, require evening dress attire. The dinner meals are less casual, but I would suggest a collared shirt for the men and a little dressy for the women. No flip-flops, tank tops or bathing wear. Just look nice. I have never seen anyone, in the dining rooms sent back to changes, but you will stick out like a sore thumb. Goofy will not be happy.]



*Dining Staff Moves with you to each Dining Experience - Pictures with Mickey & Minnie - Food Everywhere 24 Hours a Day*

Someone once told me, “never ask a question if you do not know the answer.” So I am going to ask if you ever were disappointed going to a Disney park. Why would you be surprised if the cruise experience was just the same? The level of service on board is very high standard and all the crew members try so hard to give you the feeling that you are the only person they are working for during your cruise. We are extremely impressed with the level of customer service given and it absolutely enhances our cruise overall.

I want to see Goofy! Well, this is obviously something very special and unique with a Disney ship – the characters are on board for your entire cruise and you can enjoy many benefits as a result. There are character meet and greets that happen many times a day from embarkation day to your last evening on board. The characters on board include Mickey Mouse and his pals and of course THE MAN – GOOFY, The Disney princesses, Chip and Dale, certain Disney Junior characters, and at times, certain Toy Story characters, and don’t forget the Star War theme cruises. It is so much fun seeing them around the ship, being available for those all-important photographs and seeing them participate in key shows and parties throughout the sailing. They make appearances at the sail away deck party on embarkation day, the welcome on board theatre shows and the different themed party nights throughout the cruise before saying a fond farewell on the last evening at the See Ya Real Soon show.

Food is food you say. Why is a Disney Cruise so different? Being on different cruise lines and the way the other lines did their meals made our dining experience much more than simply enjoying our meals. The rotational dining system allows guests to enjoy each of the three themed restaurants on board each Disney cruise ship. I like that you have an assigned seat with the same waiter or waitress who learns your likes and dislikes — and your names. My salad of choice is Caesar. I only told them once and then I always got my Caesar Salad — Oh Ya, extra anchovies and Iced Tea.

On the Disney Magic — Feast your eyes on an astonishing dinner show celebrating Disney storytelling at Animator’s Palate, set your taste buds aflame on American and French fare at Lumiere’s, and savor a culinary jubilee of South American-inspired delicacies at Carioca’s, inspired by Disney’s classic film The Three Caballeros.



*Colorful Dining Rooms on Board Different Disney Cruises*

On the Disney Wonder - Be drawn into an innovative dinner show starring a host of characters at Animator's Palate, dine "under the sea" on mouthwatering American and French fare at Triton's and savor a culinary carnival of Caribbean-island grill house specialties at Parrot Cay.

On the Disney Dream - Be drawn into a "state-of-the-art" dinner show at Animator's Palate, dine like a king or a queen in a classic Disney fairytale at Royal Palace, and savor an arboretum of appetizing delights in a serene conservatory setting at Enchanted Garden.

And on the Disney Fantasy - Don't miss an innovative dinner show at Animator's Palate called Animation Magic. You can also dine in a lovely setting that feels like an Enchanted Garden, or eat like a king at Royal Court in a dining room inspired by Disney fairytales.

Don't forget the buffets and 24-hour room service. Free coffee, tea, soda and ice cream.

Extra money spent is worth every penny in the restaurants alone! So although you may get great food on other ships but I am not sure that they could ever top the dining experiences you can get aboard a Disney ship. Are you celebrating a special anniversary or occasion while on board? Take your dining experience up a notch by eating at Palo's. For a modest price, you can dine in a more private setting and the food is first class. If you just want to have a special night with your favorite other, you will have a night to remember, no kids allowed.

Bon Appétit Aboard the Disney Dream and the Disney Fantasy. A French-inspired menu of superior seasonal ingredients ensures dining at Remy is always a first-rate affair. Offered at an extra cost.

Most of the cruise lines have private islands. Guess what my opinion is about Disney's Private Island? Castaway Cay is a private island owned by Disney, and reserved exclusively for guests sailing on the Caribbean or Bahamian cruises aboard the Disney cruise ships. The island is beautiful and it was definitely a port highlight on your cruise. Whether you want to sun bathe on the many different beaches, swim, snorkel, or explore the island or waters by means of a port adventure, there is something for everyone. There is even a 5k held every day for those of you who would like to run. When you have worked up an appetite, head to the barbecue location for an all-inclusive barbecue lunch. The characters also are ashore ready to pose with you for your castaway photos. So yes, it is a great destination, and again, obviously unique to Disney! By the way, the adult only beach is a tram ride away from the other beaches. Don't forget your private massage in one of the cabanas! Disney docks their ships on Castaway Cay, when most cruise lines have to tender their patrons.



*1Fun things on Castaway Cay - Docking Disney Cruises on Castaway Cay - Beautiful Family Beach*

Alright, what are the down falls? I can only think of one: No casinos.

The Disney Cruises might be more expensive than some other cruises. All I can say is you get what you pay for. The Disney cruises are well worth the extra money.

Have questions about a potential Disney cruise?

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