

The Grand Princess
Galveston to Rome – 15th April to 4th May
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Mundaring WA

I confess that I didn't know that Galveston was an Island. I thought it was a Texan cowboy town, mainly because of the song. So all in all it was a bit surreal to be in Texas and boarding the Grand Princess for a 20 day cruise.

When she was built [at 109,000grt] she was the largest liner afloat, now she's unlikely to sneak into the top 10. However, don't get me wrong, with 2600 passengers on board she is still a very big ship and there are plenty of nooks and crannies to explore and fellow cruisers to get to know.

The cruise itinerary was chalk and cheese. In the first 11 days we spent 3 hours alongside in Ft Lauderdale [no shore leave] and 6 hours in Madeira. The pace picked up considerably over the next 9 days however and we visited a different port every day including Casablanca, Gibraltar, Alicante, Barcelona, Cannes, Genoa, Elba, Pisa and Rome.

Robyn and I love sea days and we quickly settled into a daily routine as we crossed the Atlantic. The days drifted by and we took our daily walk, sat in the sun, read, ate, and enjoyed an occasional cocktail.

At the same time that we started to mellow the deck crew started cleaning, polishing and painting and literally never stopped. The ship gleamed from top to toe and was beautiful.

When we arrived in North Africa the tempo of the cruise changed significantly and we missed our long leisurely days at sea. We paced ourselves and scheduled 'lazy days' every other day i.e no tours, avoid the crowds and watch the world go by.

At the onset the layout of the ship is daunting however very quickly you realise that decks 5, 6 and 7 are the bars, theatre, show rooms, restaurants, shops etc and 14, 15, and 16 are the buffet, pool, gym [apparently] and deck bars. Everything else in between houses cabins, staterooms, suites etc. Lifts are understandably popular.

Deck 17 is Skywalkers Night Club and this is a stunning feature of the ship. It projects over the stern, some say like a shopping trolley handle, and is accessed by the Skywalk travelator. Our experience was that it was hardly ever used which made it a top spot to have a quiet afternoon read.

The food on board the Grand Princess was excellent, possibly better than any other ship we had ever sailed upon. Our table companions in the Botticelli dining room soon realised that all they had to do was ask what a particular dish contained and Francisco would provide a sample. It was not uncommon for our table of 6 to have 3 or 4 extra dessert *samples* each evening, all in the name of research.

Tim Conway, Cruise Director, had a team of 100+ people dedicated to ensuring that the passengers were entertained and he succeeded. Everything from Broadway productions to pottery painting was available. The choice was ours to participate [we should have been a finalist in the jive contest] or just sit back and let the others do the work.

The time flew by and soon it was time to disembark. We enjoyed the cruise enormously and as always we ask ourselves if we would recommend it to others.

The verdict: the Grand Princess offers a huge choice – of everything, accommodation, food, entertainment and generally did most things very well. The exception was getting on and off whilst in port. Anything that involved 2600 people at the same time took time to sort out, a small irritation in what was otherwise a memorable and wonderful cruise.