

Once a year my mom and I sail on the Monarch of the Seas for our annual Girls Cruise. We embarked on Jan 26, 2007.

The quick ratings:
bad – ok – good – great

Traveling to the ship: good
Weather: good
Embarkation: good
Cabin: bad, very bad
Cabin Attendant: great
Ship: great
Entertainment: good
Food: great
Wait Staff: great
Ensenada: good
CruiseCritic crowd: great
Disembarkation: good
Traveling home: good



We left my mom's house at Noon, and were at the port by 1:15pm. There wasn't any traffic and we had no issues getting to the ship. We parked our car and entered the embarkation lobby.

We ascended the escalator and headed for the Crown and Anchor line.

Because I had our SetSail paperwork out to enter the lobby door, our C&A status wasn't printed on our documents. The employee at the front of the line tried to usher us out of the line, and into the "Deck 2 line". We told her we were Platinum/Diamond and she let us be.

We checked in and 5 minutes later were on our way to board the ship.

We went through the metal detectors and passed by the table where they had confiscated other passenger's wine. We got onboard and went to our room and began to unpack. We had been assigned cabin 2615, and I swear to God, I will never book this room again.

I booked the cruise with an online agency, icruise, and was never informed that this cabin was directly below the centrium stage on Deck 3, and would often get noisy.





As you can see from the deck plan here, the cabin 2615, which is underneath the red bulls-eye, is directly below the centrium stage.



Yes, that brown starburst stage is where jazz bands play, and ballroom dancing is held, and basically your ceiling will vibrate whenever festivities are held. I would do anything in my power to NOT BOOK this cabin!!!! In the future also I will pay more attention to deck plans and see what is above and below my cabin. But the centrium noise would come later in the cruise.

When we first boarded we heard some music pounding noise, and could feel that it was coming from the floor. So we weren't bothered by it at first, we finished unpacking, and then went up to the windjammer for lunch. We had honey chicken (good), mom thought the chicken was dry so she put honey mustard dressing on it and it was good, the salad was fresh and my burger was ok. For dessert we had the fruit tart which was awesome and the strawberry mousse which I thought was weird. The brownie was ok, but was a tad dry.





After lunch we went back to our room for a quick nap and found that was going to be hard to do. The music was still playing and was still loud. We called Security and asked them to investigate. After our nap, we woke up for the muster drill and left early so we could stop by Guest Relations and see why the music was still going on. Dennis tried to tell us that the sound was coming from the ceiling, and we explained that while napping you could hear the pounding through your pillow, and the floor was vibrating. He chuckled that the sound was probably coming from the crew quarters below, and would have it stopped right away.

So having faith in Dennis we went to the muster drill. It was located in the Boleros lounge, and we were early enough that we had grabbed a seat, and waited for the drill to start.

The announcement being made inside was quite loud so that the guests outside could hear as well. The drill was otherwise painless and after the drill we went to the cabin and found a message from Rosa Torres, the manager at Guest Relations.

She introduced herself and said that she apologized for the noise and didn't think that it would happen anymore, but since we were under the centrium we could still hear noise and that if we wanted we could take advantage of her "emergency cabin". It was a cabin she was holding for such purposes, and it was the only cabin she had. We told her that it meant a lot to us that she was following up, and we appreciated her offer. She said that she would still hold it for us, and it was an inside cabin on deck 5, and if we wanted to use it just for naps we were more than welcome to it. Rosa was such a great person to work with. She is a true asset to Royal Caribbean.



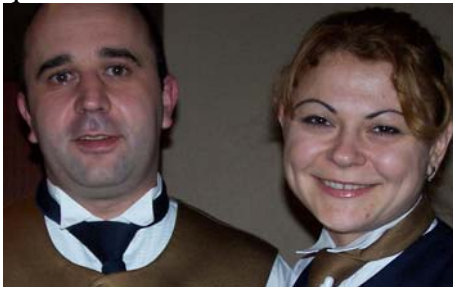
After talking with Rosa we showered and then went up to the Sail Away party. We met Terri and Jeff, and then went to Deck 12 aft at the pool area, and met Niles and David, and Ben and Lisa, and Janice and Patrick, and Tim, and Becky and Chris. We all had drinks to warm us up and used our boas to keep ourselves warm!

The port side of the pool deck, port 11 is the smoking side of the ship. There are no ashtrays on the starboard side.

We had early seating at 6:00 pm so we left for the dining room. If you have late seating, you will eat at 8:30 pm. We found our table, which was 90, and found that it was a quaint table for 4 Situated

RIGHT IN FRONT OF THE KITCHEN!!! But then we met our table wait staff, Stefan Farkas from Romania and Irina Atanasova from Bulgaria.

They were awesome and very nice and quick.



For dinner tonight I had the casesar salad (good), the prawns (good), the chicken marsala (very good, juicy & tender), the caprese salad (good), & the scallop risotto (very good). We saw many other waiters that we were friends with. We saw, Franco Andrew & Alex all from India, and Silbourne from Jamaica as well as Sheldon, & Anthony (head waiters).



For dessert we had the Angel Food Cake and the Chocolate Ice Cream. Mom had Rainbow Sherbert. It was all very good. During dinner, Yilmaz our head waiter asked if there were any special requests. I asked for Chocolate Crème Brule from the lunch menu, and he told me that they now have brand new lunch menu. He said he would try.

After dinner we went back to the cabin and there was now a different noise. This time it was from the Centrum and turns out each night they had dancing entertainment and we would have to deal with the music each night. Therefore, a lesson learned, do not book this cabin!!

Before heading out we walked down the hall and saw my mom's room for a cruise she's doing in March. We met her future room attendant, Nigel and his neighbor colleague George, both from Costa Rica.



Then we went to the Boleros lounge and we watched the Millionaire show. This was a weird game show, as many people were shouting the answers and not many people got to play. But it was entertaining nonetheless, and so we sat and watched.

Boleros is a completely non smoking lounge. As well as the dining rooms, centrum, and Sound of Music Theatre.

The cruise director was JohnnyO. He also called himself Fluff-Daddy. He was entertaining and fun.

After the millionaire show we went to Karaoke and mom was the first one to get up and sing. She encouraged others and was famous throughout the cruise. During one of the performers the KJ asked Mom to dance!



During Karaoke, I went down to the gift shop to see Joe, who wasn't there at the time, but then on my way back up through Boleros, I met Alok Sharma. He is a bartender from India and he and I chatted about Bollywood, and music and India and cities and culture and food. He is a very nice person and I enjoyed chatting with him throughout the cruise.

Hi Alok ... now email me!!! Lol

After Karaoke we went to dueling pianos. We enjoyed the show and the music and sang along with the talented performers and really had a great time. They do a great show and I recommend going there early to get a great seat.



We then went to sleep at 1am and our overall thoughts the first day were that the crew is friendly, even when just passing in the hallway. They seem to be very cordial. The guest relations staff is also very nice and accommodating. We can't wait for tomorrow!



Pictured left is Barnes Franklin and Henry!!!!

Henry is always smiling!!

Saturday morning we woke up in Ensenada. The weather was bright and sunny and the temperatures mild (low 70s). We woke up and went into the dining room for breakfast. I had the classic breakfast and it was good. Mom had the eggs and bacon, and it was also good. They had new coffee mugs which were bigger than before and we thought this was great. Our waitress for breakfast was Yuliva. She was so nice!



We disembarked the ship and went shopping in the new shopping center off of the ship. I bought Tequila. He held it for me at his booth so we could shop. Then we took a bus for \$3 per person round trip and it would take us into the downtown shopping area, and then take us back to the ship if we kept our return blue ticket.

We were looking for magnetic bracelets, medicine, and tequila. Since we had found most of our items quickly that left time to goof around. This is what Mom would look like with black hair!



I bought a silver omega and mom bought a pendant.

They have a brand new lunch menu. I understand why they changed their menu, but I really loved their Thai Lettuce Wraps. Anyhow we were sat with Brian and Randall. Mom ordered the pork chop (very good). Brian and I both ordered the Sun dried tomato wrap. To me, the tortilla tasted more like paper, so I exchanged it for the open faced steak sandwich.

We then went back to the ship and had lunch in the dining room.



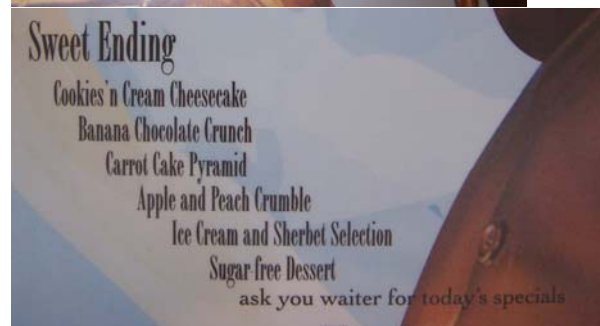
Randall asked for a club sandwich and the waiter wasn't sure if one could be made. About 5 minutes later, it was confirmed, he would have to order off of the main menu. So he ordered the beef and avocado fajitas. He said it was ok, but not great. I was then served my steak sandwich and it was fantastic!

At first we tried the banana chocolate crunch, and it wasn't good at all. That chocolate coating is masking how dry the chocolate brownie base really is. The topping isn't very crunchy and tastes stale. Mom had the apple

and peach crumble and her apples were too crunchy, and the crust tasted like it needed to be cooked longer. So we sent both back for ice cream scoops. Apparently in the dining room is the only time you can get free ice cream on the ship. But it is fine with us, as we enjoyed the cookie that came with the dessert.

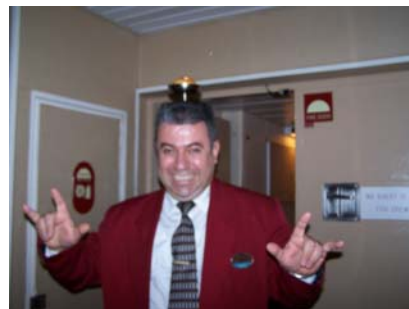


Here is the new lunch menu. The soup of the day was a cream of vegetable, and mom had it and said it was very good. The Chocolate Crème Brulee is no longer available in the dining room for lunch.



After lunch we took a nap. Three hours later we woke up and showered for dinner. We got ready and left for dinner. Tonight we would continue the great wine debate. Yilmaz tried to explain that although the travel agent gave us wine, it was only meant to be cabin wine.

Both Terri and I booked our cruises with icruise because they were giving this great promotion. We would both get a free bottle of wine each night of our cruise, and that we would enjoy it at dinner.



While booking, Terri went onto the website and selected to have it delivered to the cabin. She said that there was an option to have this delivered to the dining room directly, but her and Jeff weren't sure when they would want wine, if they wanted to have it in their cabin before or not, so that's why they didn't have it sent directly to the dining room. Anyhow, at the start of 2007, RCCL decided to start enforcing their corkage fee. Our anger wasn't because of RCCL, rather we understood why they had to enforce their rules, but our agent, icruise, did NOT tell us that there would now be new rules at RCCL's

dining rooms. Granted the rule is new, but icruise is an AGENCY and should be on top of issues like this and warn their customers. We weren't warned, we were blindsided, as in previous cruises we were allowed to show our gift card left on the wine from icruise and have the corkage fee waived. This would no longer be the case.

We learned that not necessarily icruise, but if any TA gets the wine from gifts and gear, and gives it to you as a gift, it is meant to be sent to your cabin. If you want to enjoy that wine in the dining room, you the passenger have to pay a corkage fee. Yilmaz said that when the TAs buy wine, the cost of buying it for the cabin is cheaper than buying it for the dining room. TAs don't even have the option of designating wine for dining room delivery. The \$12 fee is to make up for the lower price the TA pays.



When she got home after the cruise, Terri called RCI Gifts and Gear and at first was told that they could change her future cruise wine to dining room delivery, but the system wouldn't accept the change so a supervisor was consulted and said that it was cabin delivery ONLY because the wine was purchased at that special TA price. The icruise TA later then emailed Terri that they have also been informed that RCCL just had a meeting about this and that the rules regarding this are to be "reinforced".

So just to summarize:

- Free icruise or TA wine is cabin wine.
- Cabin wine brought to the dining room is assessed \$12 per bottle.
- Icruise customers aren't given the option of paying that wine upgrade, and the \$12 per bottle more than makes up for the money they are missing
- An RCCL cruiser can order wine for himself using RCCL's website and select to have it delivered to the dining room. You will pay more for the wine itself (Item# 1255 - Johannisberg Riesling, Chateau St Michelle - \$28.95 USD from RCCL's webpage versus \$9 on VONS.com in my neighborhood)
- Taken from the "Gifts and Gear" page on RCCL's website: Please choose Dining Room delivery if you wish to drink your wine in the dining room (corkage fee is waived). Stateroom delivery indicates you will drink your wine in your stateroom only.



Since we were angry that we weren't warned, we schemed to figure out a way to get around this. Basically open up the wine in your cabin, have two wine glasses delivered from room service, then enjoy a glass of wine in the cabin. Then pour the rest into your two glasses and then walk into the dining room. Or, if you have a soda cup, use that to drink your wine. Otherwise you'll be paying lots of money, or arguing with your head waiter. See, a glass of wine bought at a bar is not attacked in the dining room. So if it looks like a glass of wine from a bar, you will be fine.

Anyhow for tonight's dinner we had pear soup in a glass, which made it easy to drink, and was good, shrimp cocktail (good), Caesar salad (good), and the beef filet. The filet was so juicy and tender and outstanding. It was awesome. Terri and Jeff also had the duck and they said that it was much tougher than the filet. It was ok, but the beef was much better.



Dessert tonight was cherries jubilee and sherbert. They were both very good!

After dinner we went into the casino and made a donation. Mom was doing well. She played on the Hoot slot machine and won on her \$5 match coupon.

The air is very smoky if the casino is crowded, and it is hard to breathe in here when many people are smoking. During the mornings and early afternoon on the sea day, the casino wasn't busy, and sitting in the casino was more manageable. I did not notice if there was a specific cigar lounge or any cigar-friendly areas. I would advise trying the pool deck, schooner bar or casino. I didn't see signs which prohibited cigars.

Not wanting to gamble anymore, I went into the schooner bar and we played Name That Tune. We came in second, but he didn't give any prizes for that.

You can smoke in the schooner bar, in one section near the piano. If you are anywhere near the piano – even in the non smoking areas along the windows of the lounge, you will smell the smoke. This design doesn't work so well for this lounge.



We were invaded by a band of pirates from the adventure ocean!

We then went back into the Circuit for Karaoke.



You can smoke in the Circuit. It is again, on the port side of the lounge. The air is circulated well.

At Karaoke there were many good singers and we had a great time! Marco from Mexico was the host and we had a lot of fun.

We again watched the dueling pianos, and I chatted with Alok some more. The piano show was very funny and we had a great time.

We then went back to the room and slept. The next morning we woke up for breakfast in the dining room. Mom had the classic breakfast and it was good. Her croissant was dry. I had the banana and the cocoa krispies cereal. It was good. The banana was fresh and good. We sat with Rick and Mary They were a very nice couple from Utah.



Before boarding the ship, I had emailed Joe Pellegrino, the retail manager. He said he would assist me in obtaining the Christmas Tree ornaments I was missing. He was very helpful and very nice. This afternoon I went to talk with Joe. He explained to me that the ornament I had was the ornament they sold and that the ship ornaments were to scale. The reason that my Mariner ornament was bigger than the Monarch was because the Mariner is a bigger ship. Both are the only ornament they sell.

But he will help me obtain the Vision and Adventure ornaments. He is a great guy and really went out of his way for me.

We then went to Deck 11 for some inch of gold shopping and it wasn't what my mom was looking for. So she gave up and we went to the Viking Crown lounge for the Crown and Anchor party. The C&A party is a repeaters party, and it is for those that have at least 5 completed sailings with RCCL, and you have signed up for C&A benefits. C&A is not automatically activated. You must call to activate your membership. The party is from 11:45a to 12:30p, and held in the Viking Crown lounge. They have free cocktails (4 pre-made types - screwdriver, bloody mary, champagne, yellowbird) and free punch. They also have free yummy snacks - sushi, strawberries, shrimp, quiche, and its all very yum!



We sat with Becky and Chris and Jayme. They showed their pictures from Papas and Beer adventures the day before, and we had a great time. They are all very nice people!

We ate chocolate strawberries, quiche, and fried shrimp. The appetizers and drinks were great!



We sat with Niles (Dan) and David and chatted with the trivia host Jeff from Canada. He was also great to talk with and we got to ask him about his life on board.

We then walked around the ship and noticed a stowaway!

We then went back to the cabin for a minute and our previous room attendant Kesley was in the area, so we said Hi, and caught up and it was great to see him too. He really is a great person and it was so great to chat with him.

Then we went for Afternoon Trivia. We sat with Niles and David and Jessica and Chris. We also had help with a friend in the group as well and ended up winning the trivia metals with 13/15 correct answers about the Monarch of the Seas!



While at trivia, Jessica told us of her embarkation day nightmare in the Spa. She has a bad back and drove a long way from Phoenix. When they arrived at the ship at 2pm, they got their room, a quick bite and then she went to the spa to make a massage appointment. She had the card filled out but the line was 45 minutes long.

After standing in that long line, and being the second next one in line, the spa attendants told her that she wouldn't be able to book her appointment because she was going to miss the muster drill. She understood that and asked that they take her information and book the appointment for her. They wouldn't do that. They refused to help her and sent her away. She asked that they let her get to the front of the line which would form after the muster drill, and they refused that too. She asked that they call her in her room after the drill or simply she could leave the order form she filled out, and an appointment could be made for her. All spa personnel refused to help her in any way she suggested.

She became physically upset, and told Chris. Nearby was the loyalty ambassador, Danny League, who inquired why she was so upset. She told the entire spa story to Danny, who got on his computer in his loyalty office and fired off several emails. Not that I am in favor for getting folks in trouble, but I'm really upset that the spa wouldn't even contact her after the drill or process her order form for her. I added the spa incident to my comment card. Jessica, I hope you're doing better, and that the airline ride was more comfortable for you than the car trip.

After trivia that afternoon my mom and I went to see Danny the loyalty ambassador. He booked my parents for the September Liberty cruise and answered many questions about our reservations. He is always so great and is a very nice and professional employee. I gave him assistance in how to look up the cruise critic as many of my posting pals also ask about him. Danny says he is going to the Rhapsody in September. I wish him all the best.



We then went to our room and found the most wonderful treats left for us by Rosa Torres at the Guest Relations Desk. It was just the most wonderful gesture and it really showed that she went out of her way for her guests. We called her to thank her for all of her service and we told her how much we appreciate all she is doing for us.

Then we ordered room service. We shared a burger (good), a salad (good) and a hot dog and fruit (all very good).

The centrium started to play music again, so we quickly showered and went to dinner. Tonight the wine debate raged on and Jeff didn't want to sign the corkage slips, but it turns out the receipts that Yilmaz had us sign weren't for the corkage fee, just the confirmation receipt. So we really appreciated the fact that he went out of his way like that. We asked Yilmaz to show us the toothpick trick but he had some things to do and promised that tomorrow morning he would show us at breakfast.

Here is tonight's dinner menu:





I had the clam chowder soup (good), the table salad (good), and the strip steak (good, but it wasn't close to the filet). Mom had the table salad and the mahi mahi. It was good. For dessert I had the strawberry shortcake (very good) and mom had the Key Lime Pie (out of this world).



The waiters danced and since we were so close to the kitchen, I got a peek at the sound system and light systems which are all controlled by one button.



Then Yilmaz came over to our table as he had something for us. He managed to somehow get the Chocolate Crème Brulee for us. He really went out of his way, and he was an awesome head waiter.



We went back to the cabin to pack. Then we watched as our cabin attendant Barnes made a monkey. We packed our bags. The liquor shop had run out of boxes two months ago, and hasn't gotten any more liquor portable boxes in stock, so we were given a huge box with no handles. The shop said they could make handles, but I just put the bottles in my carryon suitcase and packed clothes around it. I didn't pack much so it was easy to do.

We then went to Karaoke, and stayed for quest.

At Karaoke, we were entertained by Jessica. She sang Girls just wanna have fun!!



People started to throw money at her. One guest brought a piñata, and the candy was also given to her. She did a great job!



We had a great quest team and took home second prize!!

Then we watched the dueling pianos and retired for bed around 12:30am. We had to get up early the next morning for disembarkation. When we woke up we went to breakfast in the dining room.

The classic breakfast was again good. The English muffin was fresh and the juice and coffee were great. We sat with some nice folks we'd seen all cruise long. Yilmaz, true to his word, came along and showed us the toothpick trick, along with many other toothpick, water glass tricks. We then went into deck 3's dining room and said Hello to other waiters we'd had before and wished them well. The Monarch has some great staff onboard.



We went back to our room, retrieved our suitcases from the room and stood in the disembarkation line in the centrium. Funny, the announcements were in the voice of Casey Peltier, the previous cruise director. Anyhow, the process was to hold the line off for a bit, then let the passengers go through, and so it seemed like the line was being held up, but it wasn't really. It moved fast. The couple behind us told us a great story about their friend who was on a fun shore

adventure, when she had an accident and her natural fingernail ripped off of her finger. It bled quite profusely.

She saw the ship's doctor who explained to her it would be \$100 for him to look at her finger. She was given a shot of antibiotics, and the finger was taped-up. On Monday morning when she got her bill, there was a \$480 charge from the medical staff! She was never informed of the increase in price for the service. I hope she got everything taken care of, or at least had insurance.

We then left the ship, and since this morning all crew members had to go through immigration, there was only one line for disembarking ship passengers. But our line moved smoothly, and it only took 30 minutes from the time we stood in line on the ship to when we were in our car on the way home.

We had a great time, we had great service staff, met some great new friends, and caught up with old ones. We've done the Monarch 3-day Baja itinerary before and would not hesitate to do this again. If there are any questions, please feel free to email me at Lephysteria@yahoo.com.