

For Naren's Christmas and birthday present, I gave him a cruise.
We sailed on the Monarch of the Seas on November 10, 2006.

The quick ratings: bad – ok – good – great
Traveling to the ship: ok
Weather: good
Embarkation: great
Cabin: good
Cabin Attendant: good
Ship: great
Entertainment: good/great
Food: good/great
Wait Staff: ok/good
Ensenada: good
CruiseCritic crowd: didn't see them
Disembarkation: good
Traveling to work: good



We got in line at 12:09.
We went to the Platinum and Diamond line, but there weren't many people in line anyhow. But still it made it very nice. We received our documents and I shared with the staff my hopes of not encountering the checkpoint person I'd met on the last few cruises.
When I saw that one employee was a man, I went to his line. He checked our documents, did not look for my name change. We went through the metal detector. Naren had to empty his pockets.
We boarded the ship at 12:20.



We packed our items into two carry on suitcases, and an overnight bag. It made for a very easy disembarkation later on.
We got up that morning and had the housekeeper come early that afternoon. We had breakfast so we wouldn't be starving when we boarded the ship. We packed the car and left our home at 9:30 am.

Naren had come down with a cold during the night and so we stopped on the way to the pier to get him some throat drops and some throat medicine. We had only stopped for 30 minutes, and then got back onto the 91 freeway and the traffic just got progressively worse. A few accidents within 5 miles of each other in each direction made the freeway a disaster. We finally got to the port and parked and entered the embarkation lobby.





Our rooms were not ready until 1. So we wheeled all of our luggage up to the buffet. We grabbed a table at the bow of the windjammer because the sun was too intense on the other side. We had a nice lunch. I had the honey stung chicken (very good) and the roast beef (not good, too dry), and the fruit pieces (very fresh) and jello (good). Naren had the green salad (good), the apple and carrots salad (weird, not good), the nicoise salad (good),

the pasta (good) the honey chicken (good) and the seafood salad (good). He did taste the veggie chili, but was not impressed with that, it had too many beans in it. For dessert we had the strawberry mousse (good), the brownie (good), the fruit tart (wonderful!) and the coconut cake (very good).



We then went to our cabin, and our room had been outfitted with the new upgraded linens. The new additions were decorative pillows and a down comforter. The sheets are starched and stiff.



The sheets are soft, but I thought that since they were upgrading the linens, I assumed they would also upgrade the bed sheets to a higher thread count.

The turquoise color is also very pretty. The new changes are a nice touch, a great comfort and definitely keep you toasty at night! Some nights, in fact, I was a little TOO toasty!

The sheets don a very pretty new RCCL Crown and Anchor logo. It adds a nice touch to the linens.





The annoying back cushion along the wall at your arm's level when laying down is still there, and yes it still gets in the way.

The easy way around this is to move the bed out from the wall a tad.

The shelf above the pillow is also a great place to store eyeglasses, earplugs and other items needed by the bedside (cough drops for a ill hubby).

We relaxed, unpacked, and napped. We woke up for the muster drill, and usually I like to go early. But this time I was too late and so I walked up a few flights of stairs to deck 7. Before leaving I asked Lionel, our cabin attendant if Naren had to go, as he was still asleep and had a cold and didn't want to get up. Lionel said he wouldn't tell, and hoped that Naren felt better.



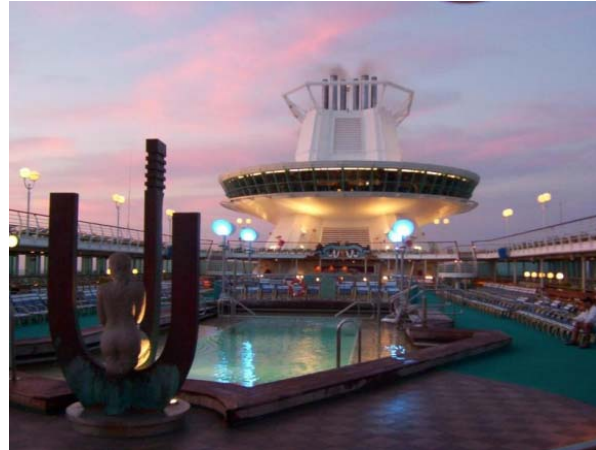
I told Naren that Lionel wouldn't tell, but Naren said that he would go anyway. So I told him I'd meet him up there. I waited for him to come into the atrium area, and listened to the team members say that odd stations are on the port side. Even stations are on the starboard side. So we went into Boleros because stations 9 and 10 were inside.

There were 4 loud drunk people next to us and they kept calling for Cletus. We wished for another muster station. They had to do some roll calling, because apparently they missed some cabins as they were coming in. We stood there for about 20 minutes, and then finally the muster drill was finished.



After the drill we headed to the pool deck for the sail-away party. Naren was goofing around and opening doors he shouldn't have.

At the sail-away party, there was an amazing sunset and we enjoyed watching them pull up the gangway. We had a California Lemonade and a sex on the beach. I didn't like either. Then I had a strawberry margarita and it was really good.



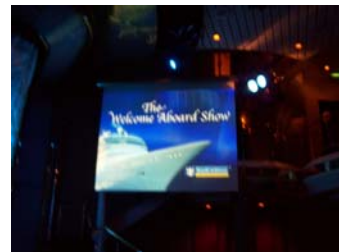
Then we went to the schooner bar. We took part in the Trivia and came up with 14 points. We didn't win, because that team had 15 points! During trivia we had a Blue Moon drink and a cosmo. The cosmo was good. After the sail-away party we then got ready for dinner.

First we went to the welcome aboard show. At the beginning there is an awesome slideshow about the Freedom of the Seas ship.



The cruise director, Casey Peltier then came out and introduced himself and the headliner act. He asked us to introduce ourselves to our neighbors sitting near us.

It made me giddy with anticipation for our Liberty Cruise with the Lunitiks! Next the singers and dancers came out for a short musical number.



Then the comedian came on stage, which was Kevin Jordan. He was funny, but we had seen his act before. He told many jokes about kids and had a flashlight as part of his act. He would shine the light at you and heckle you.



We then went to dinner. We walked into the dining room and were lead all over the place and then finally to our table by another waiter because the first one got lost. We sat down and met Steve and Suzanne, and Julie and Sue. They were all in their late 50s to mid 60s, and were all retired teachers.

They were nice people, but there was just not a lot of chemistry there, and I became very bored by the second night. The dinner conversation the first night besides the usual “who are you and what do you do” questions was centered around Retirement from Teaching. Since Naren and I are not teachers, nor retired, we didn’t have much to contribute. We were really just mis-matched. Had the cruise been longer, I’d have asked to switch.

We met our wait staff. Our waiter was Morgan from India and he was nice and did great magic tricks for us. I’m not sure if it was him, the galley or our table but for some reason dinner always took 2 ½ hours. That cut into show times (quest, love and marriage), so for this itinerary, although I love late dining, I’d probably want early seating.



Our assistant waiter was Anna from Lithuania. She wasn’t personable or friendly, but she did get the things we requested. Perhaps she was just shy.

Our Maitre D had also introduced himself. He was from Turkey and made sure that we always enjoyed our dinner.





For dinner tonight we had the caprese salad (good), the risotto and no scallops (great) and then for dinner I had the shrimp scampi. The shrimp were very good and the Maitre D showed me how to cut the tails out of the shell. I also had the chicken breast off the Alternative Selections. It was very dry!



I would NOT recommend that chicken! Naren had the caprese salad (good), the strawberry soup (weird), the risotto (good), the marsala (very good), and the pasta dish (too oily). I thought his Chicken Marsala was extremely good. I'd get that again on the next cruise.



For dessert I had the strawberry shortcake and that was very good. Naren had the tiramisu and he did not like it.



After dinner, we went to the tour desk and placed an order for the wine tour. We dropped it off at 10:30 pm, and asked the guest relations desk what we should do next.

So we retired to our cabin and set the alarm we brought for 7am. That way we can wake up and get showered and have breakfast in case we do get accepted for the tour.



They advised to see if the tickets are placed under our door. If not, call the tour desk and check with them first thing in the morning.



We woke up in Ensenada and looked outside our cabin door. We didn't have any tour tickets yet. We hoped for the best, showered, then checked again. No tickets. We called the explorers desk. They weren't there yet. So we contacted the purser's desk. They checked for us and we did get accepted for our Winery Tour. We were to meet on the pier at 8:45.

So we went to the Windjammer for breakfast. The dining room, which was our first option, would not have us in and out in time, so we headed to deck 11. This morning I had cocoa pebbles and peanut butter and jelly croissants. They were all very good. Naren had a doughnut and a danish. The danishes were great. The doughnut was not. It was more cake than doughnut. The melon was not ripe but the fried potatoes were good.





Our guide was Leslie. She knew a lot about the area and told us about the points of interest and about the Mexican history and culture.

The first winery we went to was Casa Pedro Domecq. They have been in the Guadalupe Valley for a long time and are known by their products like Presidente Brandy. Now, they are producing wines.

We disembarked the ship, and then I ran back to the cabin for my sunglasses and a handful of cough drops for Naren. Then we boarded the tour bus and headed to the wineries.

Our wine tasting excursion took us to two different wineries next to each other. The ride to the winery was approximately 45 minutes to Guadalupe Valley.



The Domecq tour guide first took us into this huge refrigerated room where the wine ferments.



Then we went to the wine cellars where the wine rests in silence.



Then we went into the CAVA, and they closed the door. At first it was very dark, but there were many lights illuminating the nearby artwork on the walls, and that helped to light our way. They played a video for us to see the winery history and the process they take to make the wine. They still keep the old barrels that they used many hundreds of years ago. They don't use them anymore but still show it to visitors.





The barrels are the first place where the wine rests just before they put it in bottles and let it rest for more time. Chateau 2002 is the best red wine you can taste in this tour. We spent about 15 minutes underground learning or trying to understand how things work when making wine. The different kind of grapes for wine and the selection of the time they have to let it rest for getting the exact point of mature.

Then we went out of the cava and up to the room where they have the tastings.



I enjoyed the white wines more than reds. I thought they were very light, very good, and reasonably priced.

The winery landscape is very pretty. The grounds are kept up very well and offers scenic views to the wine tour.

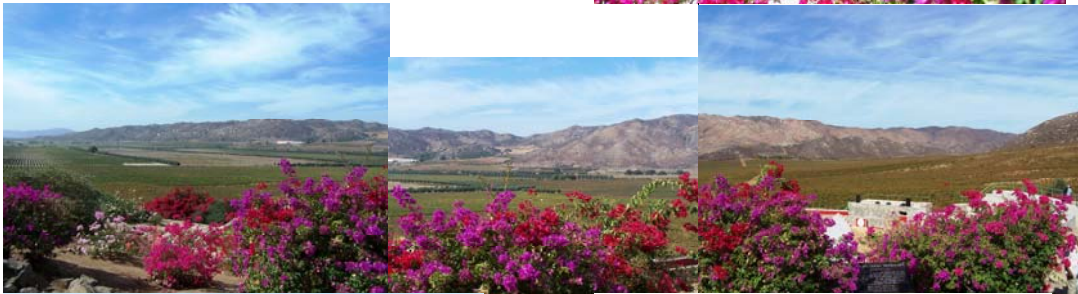




At the front entrance is a fountain and these are some of the old pottery instruments they used to ferment the wines. Now they are just decorations.

So we get into the bus again and we head to the next winery. We went literally across the street to La Cetto winery.

The bus took us to the top of this hill and stopped for 15 minutes for us to take pictures of the scenic landscape. This winery is very popular for special events. This day they were setting up for a wedding. The venue was gorgeous with flowers blooming everywhere.



From up here we were able to view the grape fields and the bullring. It was so pretty up here. Then we got back onto the bus and went to start our wine tour of the factory. They showed us the barrels where it rests for several months to get it ready for bottling.

Then they took us into the room where it rests until the time that it is opened. We then walked around the grounds and he showed us the huge empty tanks that held many liters of wine at a time! La Cetto produces 5.5 million liters of wine and 500,000 liters of brandy per year.



The grounds were so pretty. Everything was so well maintained.



We did some wine tasting, some wine purchasing, then went back to the bus. Not only can you buy delicious wine, but wonderful olive oil and delicious olives as well. We headed back to the ship, and got back onboard. We put our wine through the scanner and stood in line to check it. But the one guy checking the liquor took sooo long, we decided that we didn't want to wait, so we hopped on an elevator. They were even making people who bought olive oil check their oil. They looked at the bottle and assumed it was alcohol.





We got back to our cabin and ordered room service. We ordered a turkey sandwich (good), a cheese plate (ok), fruit plate (good – but the melon was extremely ick), a cheeseburger (good) and a Caesar salad (ok, the parm cheese was kraft grated parm cheese, not REAL parmesan cheese).

Then we napped all afternoon. Later we woke up, showered and changed for formal night. We didn't get that dressed up as we noticed many people on 3 night cruises didn't either.

We went to the Casino and donated some money. Then we went to the Captain's welcome aboard reception. The drinks were champagne and a bahama mama. Those were good. The champagne was dry.

We noticed that this was the cleavage cruise. Every woman packed her cleavage dress and hoped that her girls didn't jump out when she walked. One woman sitting next to us was talking very ill of a woman who passed by wearing a low cut black dress. The woman speaking, was wearing a very low cut black dress herself. It was toooo funny!



Naren and I actually danced!



He was laughing because he picked the longest song in the world to dance to. He wanted to pay the band to stop playing.

Then the captain introduced his crew members.



Then we went to dinner and had another wonderful meal. Morgan did another magic trick for us and it was so awesome! Other tables came by and had to see what he had done.

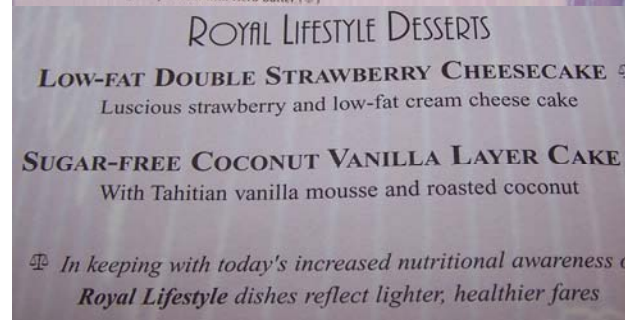


Tonight's dinner was oranges carpaccio (good), shrimp cocktail (good), lobster bisque (good), linguini alfredo (very good),

and the filet of beef (extremely good). I also had the eggplant Mozzarella. That was NOT good. It was way too salty, but on the Mariner 2 months ago, it was amazing!

For dessert we had the strawberry cheesecake and Naren had the coconut vanilla layer cake. Both were very good.

The issue with tonight's dinner is really a scheduling issue with the cruise line. They assume that if you're at a larger table, for 8, that you're going to finish dinner early. That's hardly the case. The main point about scheduling is that if you have late seating you're going to be late for tonight's entertainment also. The Love and Marriage show was at 10. It didn't replay in the cabin and since dinner was late, we missed half of the show.



MAY WE SUGGEST...
Our international cheese selection and allow us to pair it with one of our fine port wines
Port wines charged at current bar pricing.



After dinner we went to see the Love and Marriage show. It was very funny and I'm glad we got to see the second half. We were seated over where they take the gentlemen off the stage and take them backstage. One husband kept trying to come out. A crew member went back there and made sure he didn't try to come out again.

After the Love and Marriage show, we moved our seats so that we had a better view. In the theatre, if you're seated up on the second row, be aware that we can see you up there from down on the floor.

Basically, this poor woman was sitting up there in a chair, and she was wearing a short dress and we could see up her dress and I know for a fact she didn't know that. So I got her attention by waving at her, and then motioned to cover her legs. She looked mortified, and then mouthed



"OH MY GOD – THANK YOU SO MUCH". Oh poor woman!!!

Anyhow the headliner show – man of 1000 voices, Paul Boland, was very good. He started off singing songs in different voices. Then a lady came in and was looking for Bessan. He helped her look for him ... and this was really funny.



Then she sat up on stage with him and waited for him to come to the theatre. He began to sing I'm a believer, then left the stage and started giving lap dances to the ladies in the audience. He got up on the row of seats in front of me, looked at me and then started to dance on me, all the while, he kept singing. LOL

The spotlight shined on me, and it was right in my eye! LOL, And I was laughing so

hard, and Naren kept shouting at him, “Hey!! Stop that! I’m right here!” And I couldn’t see Paul dancing, because of that damn spotlight, LOL, so I said, “Oh my god, I can’t see anything” LOL

He started laughing too, and couldn’t sing and laugh ... so that was very funny! Then he got on top of Naren and started dancing on him!!!! LOL, Then Naren kept squirming and finally, he moved on to another person in the audience. LOL it was sooo funny!

He reunited the lost lady and Bessan, and made Bessan start dancing seductively for his girlfriend. LOL, then another lady came up and started screaming like she was his groupie. Then another guy came up and screamed at him. So he made the other guy dance too!

It was so funny!



After the show we went back to the cabin. We were going to the disco, but the good music would be over at 12:30 and that was in 15 minutes. So we went to the casino again. I broke even. Naren didn’t win anything. He was tired, so I continued to gamble.



I went to the Internet café to check my email, check on the house alarm and to check in with my cruise critic people.

I went back to the cabin. It was about 2am, and the ship now starts to rock, pretty bad actually.

I had just posted that all was calm and the seas were smooth!!!!

The ship rocked all night. It was pretty bad and I started to get a little sick. I couldn't sleep and was getting really cranky because I wasn't getting to sleep!

Ok, it wasn't actually as bad as this, but it felt like it!!!

(This is the CCL Ecstasy in the Gulf during a hurricane, post Katrina)



So ok, the ship moved all night. I took some Dramamine and fell asleep eventually. I woke up at 10am and we called room service for breakfast in bed. We ordered danishes, coffee, fruit and orange juice. Everything was good. We were on our way to the Viking Crown Lounge and we saw Henry!!!

Then we went to the Crown and Anchor party and had some hors d'ovres and drinks. These drinks were strong and the chocolate covered strawberries were delicious! I had a few, and some Turkish cookies and other things. Yum!



I ate many snacks at the crown and anchor party and so when I got back to the cabin, I sort of kinda fell asleep.



Naren decided to go off for the afternoon. He said that he went to the Windjammer for snacks. He had a beet salad (good), the thai pepper beef salad (good) and the tandoori chicken (very very good). Then he went to the pool deck to watch the bellyflop contest.

After that, he went to the casino and didn't win anything.

He came back from the casino and we went to the windjammer for snacks.

I had an Italian steak sandwich (very good), a cheeseburger (very good) and some cookies (very chewy and moist! Yum!)
Naren had made his own sandwich and then had a few salads from the bar. Lunch selections were plentiful. We just wanted a snack anyhow.

Tonights Dining Menu:

Appetizers: Sun dried tomato hummis
Citrus Salmon
Clam Chowder
Onion Soup
Berries in buttermilk soup

Entrees: Tempura Fish
Turkey dinner with traditional sides
Indian Veggie Curry

Dessert: Brownie Madness or Key Lime Pie

We then walked to the dining room and gave the wait staff their tips for the cruise and explained that we wanted to go to Quest and that we wouldn't be joining them for dinner.

We thanked them and then left to gamble some more.



Then we walked around the ship, we packed our carry ons, and then looked over the Compass pages. Quest was going to fall right in the middle of our dinner. So we called room service and ordered dinner to be delivered.

We had the Hummis (very good), the clam chowder (very good), the Tempura (ok), the Veggie curry (ok) and the brownie madness (brownie was dry), and the key lime pie (good).

Room service said at 7:15 they would take until 8:00 to deliver, and it was right on time.



Then we went to the circuit and watched the Karaoke singers. Some of the participants started to dance!

Then we had Quest. This was so much fun! I won't say what they wanted but it was definitely one of the best things on our cruise.



After Quest we went to Boleros and watched the dueling piano show. That was a lot of fun. The guys sang a very cute song about “just the cutest little cat”. LOL!

They sang many other songs and their set list went well past 1:00. They did a few more songs and their show was over at 1:20.

We went back to the cabin and set our wake up call for the next morning.

Before we went to sleep we inquired into the purser’s desk about how to disembark. The first person we spoke with told us that if we’re carrying off our luggage, we have to be in the centrum at 7:00 am only. Our luggage has to be sniffed. I went away from that conversation thinking that I’ve never had my carry ons sniffed before, and wondered if she misunderstood me. Again I asked another purser what the disembarkation procedure was. She said that we can get off the ship whenever we wished. So we said to ourselves that we would just play it by ear and exit when we were finished with breakfast.

We docked in San Pedro. We woke up at 6am, got ready and then went for breakfast in the dining room at 6:45. We were seated with an expectant mother of twins. She had to tell the embarkation folks how far along she was. She was not at her 27th week, so she was fine. If at all during the sailing she was going to enter into her 27th week, she could not sail. I thought it was 25 weeks.





Anyhow, we had breakfast. I ate the classic breakfast, two eggs and sausage and hash browns. The eggs and sausage were great. The hash browns were like fried burger king potatoes and they weren't that great. Naren had the milk and cereal and danishes. Everything was good. The apple and orange juice was very good.

We left the dining room at 7:30. We went back to our cabin, got our luggage and exited the ship.

We went through the customs line and the officer was giving the party ahead of us a story about something. Then it was our turn. We got through customs and went down the escalator. We exited the building and on my way out, I saw many confiscated items. There were slingshots, bows and arrows and irons!!

We got to our car, paid for our parking \$36 and left for home. We left the parking lot at 8:00. We drove to our office at 10:00.

