



My Bare Necessities Nude Cruise

By Gary Mussell

In December 2016, Haulover's Beach Mom Shirley Mason telephoned me to ask if I wanted her ticket for the Bare Necessities cruise in February. Never having been on a cruise I immediately said yes even though it was for only one person and Patty would be left behind (she said it was ok if I went alone). I had to scramble to renew my passport and make airplane reservations, but somehow, I got through all the preliminaries and at noon on February 6, I found myself boarding the Celebrity Constellation in Port Everglades, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

This is a huge ship! Over 965 feet long, 12 levels high and holding over 2,000 passengers, it immediately brought visions of *The Poseidon Adventure* to mind as I went through customs and crossed the gangplank. Later in the week, the Captain hosted a talk and slideshow showing it cost over a billion dollars to build. Nevertheless, the first day at sea there was a mandatory lifeboat drill which was fun as I got to meet a lot of new people as we waited for the all clear. I discovered most of the passengers had been on several of the nude cruises before, some as many as eight. Some were owners of businesses or managers in large corporations eager to spend their children's inheritance on themselves. Not so many middle class worker bees can afford the cruise fee, the airfare, and all the extras (like drink packages and island excursion trips) that the ship eagerly wants you to buy once you are on board.

There is a 24-hour food court (you name the cuisine, they have it!) plus one really nice restaurant included in your cruise ticket, but there are also several upper-end restaurants onboard that cost a little extra. Some (but not all) spa services are included. There is a theater with a different show and theme every night from Mardi Gras to Cowboys to the circus. And just in case you have extra cash in your pocket, there is the casino that ran constantly when we were not in port.

Actually, no cash was ever needed on board. We all wore blue "SeaPass" cards on lanyards around our necks. These little blue credit cards instantly added purchases to our final bill without so much as a thought. We used them as identification (along with a photo ID) to leave the ship and return whenever we were in port, although on land the locals demanded regular greenbacks or else the currency of the island. In the city of Port de France, Martinique, this meant Euros. The afternoon we were there, I saw the Fat Tuesday parade and celebration (photo below). Almost everyone wore red with devil horns and had a grand time dancing in the street in decorative costumes and bands playing a wide assortment of reggae-rhythm drums.

Many of the other ports where we landed for one-day visits appear to survive on tourists like us, and the taxis and tour guides make sure we stop to shop at their friend's stores. Most shops held all the touristy merchandise and clothing one could ever want to buy. After all, if I was spending my grandkid's inheritance the least I could do is bring them home a jewelry bauble or T-shirt.

In San Juan, Puerto Rico and Samana, Dominican Republic, the dominant language was Spanish, but the locals were more than happy to speak English when you asked for directions or advice on where to eat. San Juan was the only real city on our tour, with bustling traffic navigating its narrow and colorful streets. I would like to have spent a week there instead of just the day. Samana was much less developed and crowded with motorbikes. I hired a taxi to show me around and I soon learned that driving on the right side of the road was a suggestion not the law. I don't know how many near misses we had with the locals on their bikes but somehow people knew to get out of the way moments before they would have been killed.

Grand Turk Island is the home of the original Jimmy Buffet Margaritaville restaurant (parrot photo below) and tourist village. Of course, I had to have lunch there. Had a great hamburger and a souvenir drink glass! Coco Cay, our last stop in the Bahamas is a private island owned by the cruise company so we could go naked on shore everywhere but in the village. They prepared a big BBQ lunch for us and we planned to lay out among the rows and rows of beach chairs and umbrellas, splashing in the Caribbean waters wearing just a smile. But near-gale-force winds suddenly came up and blew the sand all over our sunscreen-lathered bodies so that we were feeling like breaded chicken. Most passengers, disappointed, returned to the ship, and instead spent the rest of the afternoon on Deck 10 enjoying the ship's three swimming pools and six Jacuzzi's. Ah yes, life is so hard sometimes!

The only down moment was leaving the ship on the 11th day, as a sudden tornado sighting, lightning, and torrential rain hit Ft. Lauderdale forced us to stay on the ship an extra 3 hours as the city lost power and they could not extend the gang planks nor operate the TSA/Customs machines. Just as we were starting to feel like Katrina victims they said we could disembark.

If you ever get the chance to take a clothing-optional cruise, by all means do it! If for no other reason than to spend some of your grandchildren's inheritance. Buy them a T-shirt instead and they may even forgive you.

