

Traveling in the Caribbean

We are off to visit the Caribbean using Royal Caribbean, Jewel of the Seas (Cabin 1016 - Deluxe Ocean view Stateroom with Balcony) departing San Juan, Puerto Rico on Sunday December 18, 2016 with stops St Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, St Maarten, St Kitts, Antigua, St Lucia, and Barbados. We are planning on being in San Juan a few days early to have some time to look over the city.

Date	Port
Dec 16, 2016	San Juan Puerto Rico
Dec 17, 2016	San Juan Puerto Rico
Dec 18, 2016	San Juan Puerto Rico
Dec 19, 2016	St Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands
Dec 20, 2016	Philipsburg, Philipsburg, St. Maarten
Dec 21, 2016	Basseterre, St. Kitts
Dec 22, 2016	St. John's, Antigua
Dec 23, 2016	Castries, St. Lucia
Dec 24, 2016	Bridgetown, Barbados
Dec 25, 2016	Cruising
Dec 26, 2016	San Juan Puerto Rico



Spirit of the Sea



We have new passports this year so we are ready to travel. We will visit 6 different countries during our trip.

We elected to fly into San Juan, Puerto Rico to save two days of just being on the ship, which would drive us crazy. Getting to San Juan we will hopscotch across the U.S. via American airlines visiting such fine airport as Dallas, Charlotte and San Juan, PR and returning via Miami and Dallas. Once in San Juan we will stay at the Sheraton Old San Juan hotel.

Where is the Eastern Caribbean?

The **Lesser Antilles** are a group of islands in the Caribbean Sea. Most form a long, partly volcanic island arc between the Greater Antilles to the north-west and the continent of South America. The islands form the eastern boundary of the Caribbean Sea with the Atlantic Ocean. Together, the Lesser Antilles and the Greater Antilles compose the Antilles (or the Caribbean in its narrowest definition). When combined with the Lucayan Archipelago, all three are known as the West Indies.

The **Greater Antilles** is a grouping of the larger islands in the Caribbean Sea: Cuba,

Hispaniola (containing Haiti and the Dominican Republic), Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and the Cayman Islands. The Greater Antilles constitute over 90% of the land mass of the entire West Indies, as well as over 90% of its population, with the balance made of the archipelago of the Lesser Antilles, which is a chain of islands to the east (running north-south and encompassing the eastern edge of the Caribbean Sea where it meets the Atlantic Ocean) and south (running east-west off the northern coast of South America).

The **Lucayan Archipelago**, also known as the Bahama Archipelago, is an island group comprising the Commonwealth of the Bahamas and the British Overseas Territory of the Turks and Caicos Islands. The archipelago is in the western North Atlantic Ocean, north of the Antilles, and east and southeast of Florida.

The **West Indies** is a region of the North Atlantic Ocean in the Caribbean that includes the island nations and surrounding waters of three major archipelagos: the Greater Antilles, the Lesser Antilles and the Lucayan Archipelago. The term may also be synonymous with the term Caribbean Basin. The region is generally defined as the area running from Florida westward along the Gulf coast, then south along the Mexican coast through Central America and then eastward across the northern coast of South America. Bermuda is also included within the region even though it is in the west-central Atlantic, due to its common cultural history created by European colonization of the region, and in most of the region by the presence of a significant group of African descent.

After the first of the voyages of Christopher Columbus to the Americas, Europeans began to use the term *West Indies* to distinguish the region from the East Indies of South Asia and Southeast Asia.

Getting ready for the trip

Date: T-4

We are starting to line up all the paperwork such as passports, most of these countries do not require a passport but will take a birth certificate if staying less than 24 hours in their country We are studying excursions we are interested in taking. The dog/house sitter is all signed up so we are set.

Date: T-3

Off to doctors appointments for Tom and Carly. Carly we just want to make sure she is OK after her bout with phenomena and Tom wrecked his back this weekend picking up a large item that Diana had said "Don't Pick It Up", me bad...

Cameras and the various cords are assembled and the vitamins are counted and packed for travel. Taking a small computer and maybe I will read e-mail!

Date: T-2

The chatter of what we are planning on doing at each stop is exciting. Sometimes the chatter continues in my head as I try to sleep. Suitcases are selected and we are using the same ones that have travelled with us in our trips to Australia, Alaska and locations within the continental United States.

Question for the day, should we use the laundry facilities on board ship? There is no personnel laundry service. Does bring back a memory of a trip we did with our good friends Bob and Mary as we met them and other folks in the laundry room. What a fun time with so much laughter.

Did miss the gym yesterday but will attend today. Diana wanted to make sure my muscles were loose so she volunteered me to vacuum the entire house. Met with House/Dog sitter for a final review and transferring of useful information.

Date: T-1

Now I am checking on Internet access on the ship. The ship is WIFI enabled, it's called VOOM, Royal Caribbean's High speed Internet. VOOM is considered 6 times faster than typical cruise WIFI. My question, "As compared to what", at \$15 USD (U.S. dollars) per day I may update my blog every other day.

On the voice side it's a little different. First of all we have a possible interested party concerning the house in the mountains. So we may need voice access. As our carrier is Verizon that offer voice service on "Pay as you go". This feature is implemented during our travels.

About 3 PM this day (12/14/2016) I looked for a book to take on our trip to read. I selected the book "Gun and the Gospel", written by our great Grandfather. As I opened the book and looked at the Intro I could not read out of my right eye. What is going on? OMG is my eye damaged and I can't fly tomorrow? I called the eye doctor and explained my issue. They said they would put me into their system and someone would get back with me. Diana said "let's just go to the eye doctor office and stand there and they will get to us". Sure enough after about an hour I was accepted as a patient and they ran many tests including imaging the eye. Wow, what technology, Amazing. There was a 3D image of my eye. The doctor examined my eye and showed us that the retina had fluid behind it thus causing the image presented to the eye to be distorted. "No worries he said" and approved me to travel. He continued "Just make an appointment with the Retina center and they will use a laser to calm the eye". So, I have an appointment on the 3rd of January. Thank God...

Author's Note: After returning from the trip I had the appointment and they review my right eye. It has a leaking blood vessel behind the retina and they scheduled a visit so they can insert some medicine into the eye.

It was a most amazing experience. They clean the eye and deaden it and then the doctor comes in and puts a needle in my eye with medicine. I can see it expand across the eye like a fragmented explosion.

That night it felt like I had a rock in my eye. Two days later is it feeling and looking fine, only three more sessions.

Day 0 (Dec 15, 2016) and trip begins.

I am up at 3:30 AM and just making coffee. Our plan is to get up at 4 AM and be at the airport by 6 AM.

We left ABQ on time (7:30 AM) and changed planes in Dallas and Charlotte landing in San Juan 10:30 PM after a 3 hour fight from Charlotte. Time zone difference is three hours. First selfie in Charlotte...



We met a couple in the Charlotte that was waiting at our gate. They had been flying to Dominican Republic and their airplane had to turnaround after they had gotten almost half way and comeback to Charlotte as they had engine trouble. The airline was trying to find a flight crew that would not time out before they finally arrived in the Dominican Republic again. They finally boarded a plane and I wished them farewell. They were a funny couple, we enjoyed their company.

The last portion of our flight is from Charlotte to San Juan. It is a 2 ½ hour flight and downright boring (a good thing of course). It was so nice to feel the wheels of the aircraft touchdown in San Juan.

We took a taxi from airport to the hotel (Sheraton Old San Juan).



The Grand Staircase in the lobby of the Sheraton hotel where we are staying

As we headed for the hotel we noticed most road signs are in Spanish. Taxi driver had a good command of English. The taxi driver said the ships dock just across the street from the hotel-an interesting statement. After checking in at the hotel we made a visit to the local Walgreens for a bottle of wine and cheese and crackers. Nice way to end a very long travel day.

Day 1 (Dec 16, 2016)

A brief history of San Juan Puerto Rico

(Country - U.S.; currency U.S. Dollar)

As a territory of the United States, San Juan, Puerto Rico, is one of the most historic cities in the New World, first explored and settled within fifteen years after Columbus monumental first voyage. It has been the scene of many historic events, from naval battles to pirate attacks.

The first settlement on the island of Puerto Rico was Caparra, founded in 1508 by Juan Ponce de Leon, a Spanish explorer and conquistador best remembered for his supposed quixotic quest to find the Fountain of Youth in sixteenth-century Florida. Caparra was unsuitable for a long-term settlement, however, and the settlers were soon moved to an island a short distance to the east, to the present site of Old San Juan.

The new city of San Juan Batista de Puerto Rico quickly became famous for having a good location and port, and it quickly rose to importance in the colonial administration. Barely 20 years after it had been founded San Juan was home to a university, a hospital and a library.

It did not take long for the city to come to the attention of Spain's rivals in Europe. The first attack on the island took place in 1528, when the French razed several outlying settlements, leaving only San Juan. San Felipe del Morro, a formidable castle, was begun in 1539

The first few decades under American rule were mixed for the city. Although some industry was developed, a series of hurricanes and the Great Depression had a profound effect on the economy of the city and the island in general. This grim economic situation led to a small but determined independence movement and a great deal of emigration from the island. Most emigrants from Puerto Rico in the 1940's and 1950's went to New York City in search of better jobs.

We are off on a walking tour of San Juan

On our first day we are awake and it was 8:30. Wow nice night. Once we got organized it was close to 11 AM. It was already hot and muggy. We had breakfast at the local Subway and noticed everything is in Spanish and English.

San Juan is not only Puerto Rico's largest city; it's also one of its oldest and most historic. Old San Juan offers us a chance to go back in time and imagine what life would have been like on this Caribbean Island a few hundred years ago in the days of pirates, wooden ships and fair maidens. It's an intriguing look into the past.



El Galeon (a replica of the original ships of the day)



Signs in English and Spanish



The dock just across the street from our hotel



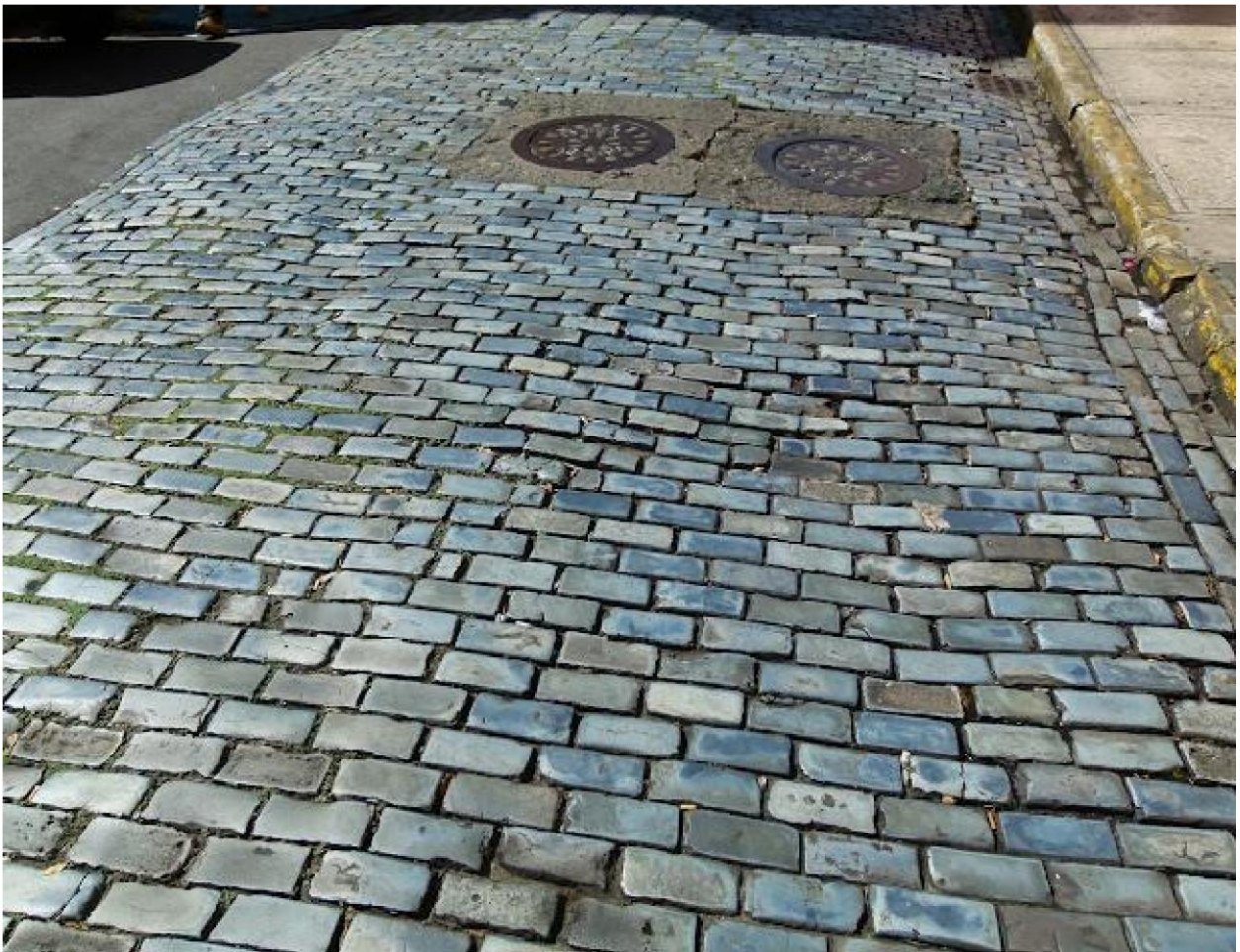
Typical house in the area



The governor's mansion



Very small street, glad I am not driving



The bricks of Old San Juan were made from the slag of Spain's iron foundries. That is why they are blue.



As we walk we notice a large number of houses (La Perla) are outside the walls of the old city

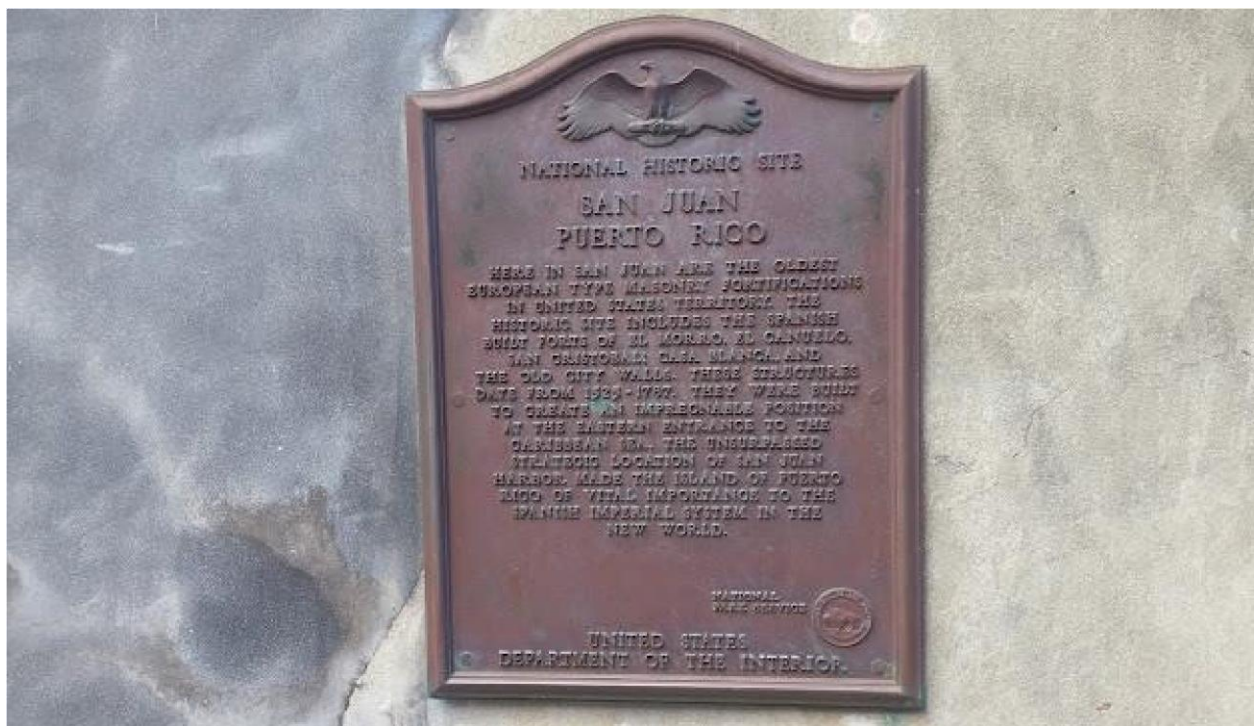
In the afternoon we toured Casstillo San Cristobal

Casstillo San Cristobal, was built over 150 years to protect El Morro and the city from land attacks. The walls were inspired by such attacks by rivals (England 1598 and Holland 1625), it was designed by the Irish-born Chief Engineer Thomas O'Daly. O'Daly served Spain because Spain was an enemy of Ireland's enemy England.

Castillo San Cristobal is the largest defenses ever built in the Americas, it rose 150 feet covering 27 acres of land. The size and height along with its design was no match for the enemies of the island. It lost some outworks when part of the city wall was torn down in 1897 to expand the city of San Juan.

La Perla is a historical community astride the northern historic city wall of Old San Juan stretching about 650 yards along the rocky Atlantic coast immediately east of the Santa Maria Magdalena de Pazzis Cemetery and down the slope from (north of) Calle Norzagaray.

La Perla was established in the late 19th century. Initially, the area was the site of a slaughterhouse because the law required them and homes of former slaves and homeless non-white servants – as well as cemeteries – to be established away from the main community center; in this case, outside the city walls. Sometime after, some of the farmers and workers started living around the slaughterhouse and shortly established their houses there.



Here in San Juan are the oldest European type masonry fortifications in United States territory
dates (1525-1787)



The three flags. The Burgundy Cross was the Spanish military flag”



Looking out through the wall where the canon faced.



The fort was used during WW II to assure that the German submarines did not get into US waters.



This girl has a lot of balls...



Honoring Christopher Columbus



Streets in San Juan

As we head back to the hotel we walk through portions of Old San Juan



We had lunch at this local bar. Watching the bar tender make drinks was amazing. He eyeballed the measuring. What a crap shot for drinks...



Very small streets

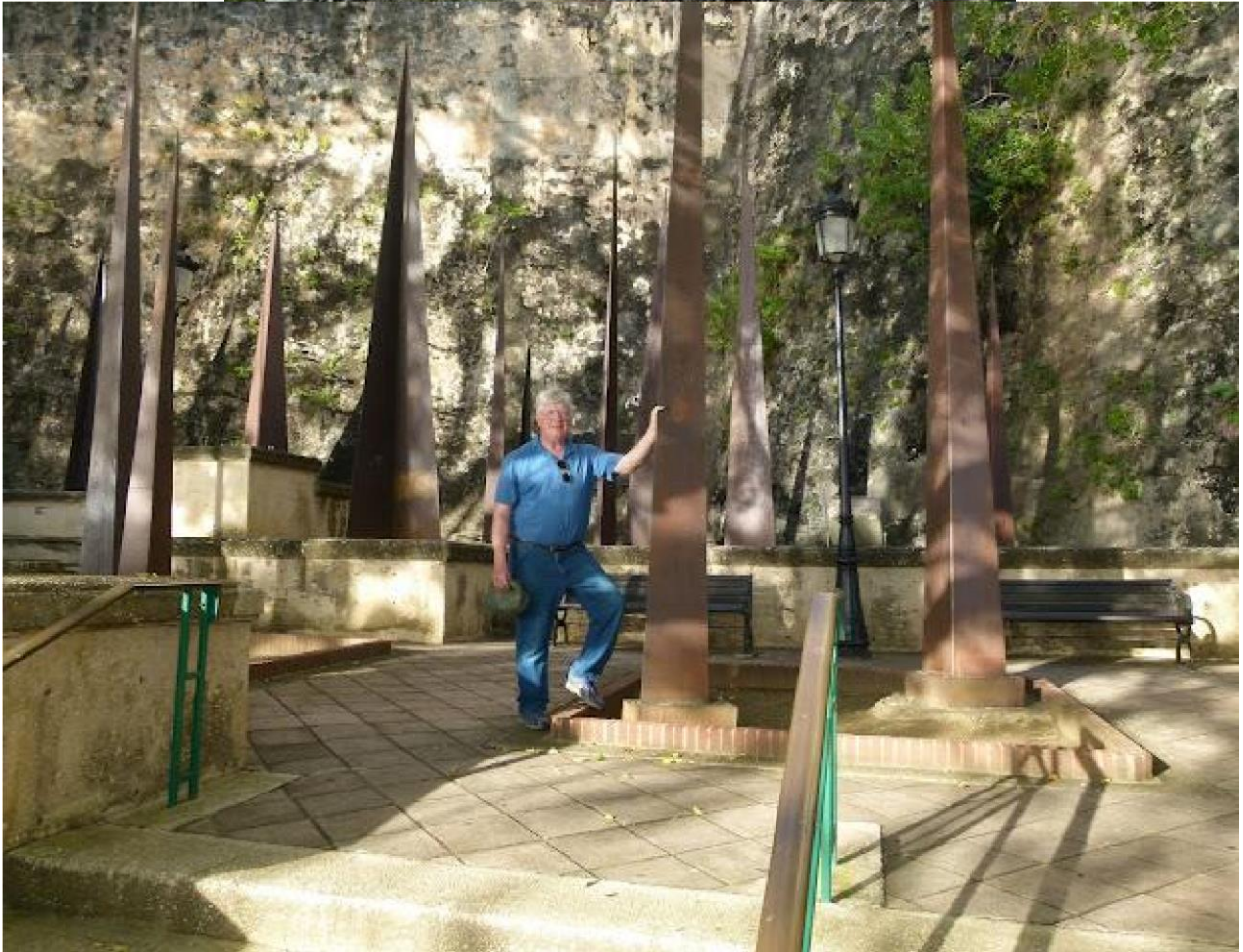


Sitting next to the Princess. As "my story" goes she had lied to her husband to she was turned to stone
actually a sculpture of Queen Isabella



The fountain represents the people of the city. Legend has it that came out of the sea.

This fountain has a bronze sculpture by Luis Sanguino called "**Raíces**", which symbolizes the island's cultural roots.



Modern sculptures



Wall of the city. Built by the slave labor



If you were a dignitary arriving from Spain you would enter through the gate called the "San Juan gate"



A view of the wall looking across the shore line



Christmas Directions





We are inside the Cathedral of San Juan. What a beautiful place. Meet a priest and upon approaching him I thought it would be a Spanish conversation but it was perfect English as he was from part of the Eastern United States. There are no English mass services in old San Juan.

The Catedral Metropolitana Basílica de San Juan Bautista or in English, Cathedral of San Juan Bautista, is the Roman Catholic cathedral of the Archdiocese of San Juan de Puerto Rico. The cathedral is one of the oldest buildings in San Juan, located in Old San Juan, and is the second oldest cathedral in the Americas.. the Cathedral of San Juan Bautista was the first cathedral church on the Western Hemisphere as San Juan, then known as the city of Puerto Rico, was the first diocese of the New World with bishop Don Alonso Manso in 1511.



What a beautiful picture of the Virgin Mary and look at the kids (from all different backgrounds)



Communion Rail



A three-dimensional statue of the Virgin of San Juan

[A better view of the 3D statue](#)



"This quaint little chapel at the southern end of Cristo Street dates back to 1753. Conflicting stories account for its construction. Some say it commemorates a miracle, others say it was built to prevent further tragedy. At the time, young men raced horses down the hill as part of the San Juan Bautista festivities. Legend has it that a young man and his horse went over the city wall and plunged into the bay during a race. A witness cried out to Christ to save the man and miraculously he survived. In another version, he perished. In any case, the faithful began to visit the chapel in the hope that their prayers would also be answered. As offerings, they left articles made of gold and silver. These were later molded into an elaborate altar, picture frame and other religious objects now on display."



Narrow city streets



A Garden



Huge Doors



The Hospital of Our Lady of Conception: first hospital of San Juan, Puerto Rico





The eye doctor returned my phone call. He asked my name and DOB. We chatted and he said "Eye OK but will need additional tests when we return". That's good NEWS. He mentioned he will be in San Juan next week.



At day's end we each had a local beer and a local sampler of San Juan foods. A nice place to relax (outside bar associated with the hotel) overlooking the Harbor. Ended with a rain storm chasing us all back in inside.

We estimated we walked 7 miles this day.

[More pictures from San Juan - Day 1](#)

Day 2 (Dec 17, 2016) San Juan

Up after a good sleep and discussing what we are going to do today. I am usual confused on the day. I thought we boarded the ship today, but no it is tomorrow evening. That gives us another full day in San Juan. We decide to walk to El Morro.

As the day begins I look out the window and expect to see balloons but no just giant cruise ships (The Viking is the closest). We do not see our ship but it is not to dock until this evening.



As we walked towards El Morro we see a yellow house tucked in between two buildings.



The entrance gate of El Morro





As we walked along the Pecho del Morre (Outside the walls)





We saw lots of cats. In the 1950s, some rats decided to take up residence in the colorful colonial town of Old San Juan, Puerto Rico. So the residents came up with a brilliant idea – bring in some cats. And within a short period of time, their rat problem was solved. The humans were very grateful to the cats, that is, until the feline population began to get out of control.


By 2004, one of the biggest hotbeds of the stray cat problem was centered at the Paseo del Morro National Recreation Trail, a waterfront walkway that winds alongside the San Juan Bay and the western section of the San Juan Wall. Approximately 250 feral cats were living along the Paseo. San Juan adopted a program to humane TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return) methods, the program has decreased the colony's population from 250 felines in 2005 to around 100. Ferals receive regular food, water, medical care and

shelter for the rest of their lives, while kittens and friendly cats get a chance to find forever homes throughout Puerto Rico and in the mainland U.S. via Save A Gato's adoption program.

San Juan National Historic Site National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior

Preservation Project for the Bastions of Santa Elena and San Augustin

San Juan National Historic Site has received 5 million dollars over 3 years for one of the most comprehensive projects ever authorized for the historic city walls. Trained park staff will carry out treatments over the next three years that will protect and preserve this historic asset.



The three primary goals of the project will be to:

- Reduce Water Retention by Improving Drainage Systems
- Remove Vegetation and Other Biological Growths
- Repair Masonry Units and Joints

Why do the walls look different?


The south city wall is the oldest portion of the city wall defensive system. In the past, various repair campaigns were carried out by the Corps of Engineers, and in recent years by the National Park Service to remedy sections of the wall that collapsed due to impact from waves and storms. Sections of those walls actually collapsed during the 20s and 30s and are mostly concrete.

San Juan National Historic Site will conduct the repairs to the wall in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. A park specific protocol has also been developed to assure that all preservation work is carried out in a manner that is sensitive to the delicate nature of the historic structure.

D2 Biological Solution has been approved for use during this project to clean the walls because it is not harmful to the historic masonry, the environment or human health. The solution will be utilized for the removal of mold, algae, lichen, tubercles and air pollutants.

During the cleaning process, the solution is applied to the surface and allowed to sit for the allotted time and then masonry is scrubbed with a soft bristle brush and rinsed with water. The procedure will be repeated as necessary.

The use of power tools will not be permitted during this project, all work will be done with hand tools or by other means that will not cause harm to the historic masonry.



San Juan National Historic Site National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior

Proyecto de Preservación para los Bastiones de Santa Elena y San Augustin

San Juan National Historic Site ha recibido 5 millones de dólares por más de 3 años para uno de los proyectos más completos jamás autorizados para las murallas históricas. En los próximos tres años el personal entrenado del parque, llevará a cabo tratamientos para su conservación y preservar este bien histórico.

Damage Control

Notice the large rocks along the shore. Also notice the coating of concrete on the hillside in front of you. Both the rocks and the coating help save historic features.

Wind, rain, and ocean waves continuously erode the hill and shoreline, which threatens the massive fortification above.

To reduce erosion, a breakwater was installed in 1949. The rock pile along the shoreline (called *riprap*) was started in the 1970s and completed in the 1990s. The concrete coating, sprayed or "shot" onto the slope, is called *shotcrete*. Riprap, shotcrete, and the breakwater minimize the damaging effects of natural erosion and preserve the historic features of San Juan National Historic Site.



San Juan National Historic Site

500 Years of Human Passage

Through the channel in front of you and into the harbor to your left sailed explorers and traders, soldiers and slaves, colonists and craftsmen, pirates and privateers. Later arrivals included immigrants and merchants, and today tourists and sightseers from around the world.

500 años de tránsito humano





Paseo del Morro

The Paseo del Morro trail follows the base of the historic walls that surround the city of Old San Juan. Built in 1999 and designated a National Recreation Trail in 2001, the Paseo del Morro links the Paseo de la Princesa, San Juan Gate, and El Morro along the harbor. A steep climb takes visitors up to El Morro. Plans include extending the Paseo del Morro from this point to the fortress of Castillo San Cristóbal about a mile east along this coastline.



We are now inside El Morro

[View of the ocean waves](#)





Diana

El Morro was built to protect San Juan Bay's deep harbor from attack by sea. It was the first good harbor for sailing ships en route to the new world after a one or two month voyage from Europe.

El Morro evolved from a promontory with canon to a massive, six level fortress. It was worth Spain's access to the New World wealth over most of 300 years. El Morro has endured as a masterpiece of military engineering from the 1500s to the present.



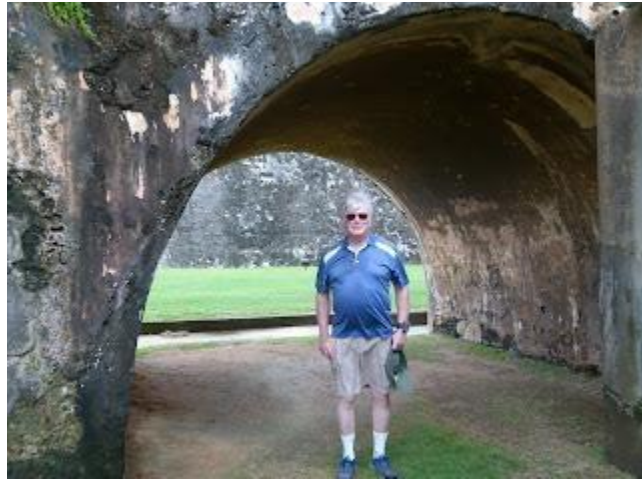
Mother-in-tongues (Sharp & Nasty)



The Light House



Entrance to the facility





Taking pictures of each other



National Park folks were after this “crazy ass” Person...

Santa María Magdalena de Pazzis Cemetery is a colonial-era cemetery located in Old San Juan, Puerto Rico. It is the final resting place of many of Puerto Rico's most prominent natives and residents. Construction began in 1863 under the auspices of Ignacio Mascaro. The cemetery is located outside the walls of Fort San Felipe del Morro fortress, one of the island's most famous landmarks. The average height of the wall is 40 feet and the width ranges from 15 to 20 feet. It was named in honor of Saint Maria Magdalena de Pazzi. According to Rafael Rodríguez, Chaplain and director of pastoral services at the Universidad del Sagrado Corazón located in the Santurce district of the capital, the location of the cemetery is central

to the Puerto Rican belief in the separation of death and life. The colonial Spanish government at the time construction of the cemetery commenced, viewed death with fear because it was a mystery. Therefore, they decided to build the cemetery to overlook the Atlantic Ocean to symbolize the spirit's journey to cross over to the afterlife





[More Pictures from San Juan Day 2](#)

Day 3 (Dec 18, 2016) San Juan



As we have a few hours before we board the ship we decided to visit a few art/history museums in San Juan. We started the day by eating breakfast on the plaza. It was fun to watch the folks and they did their everyday business.

We toured a gallery that show the artist Arnaldo Roche who reveals the place where beauty settles down, similar to a self-critical eye, from the perspective of an action made from and through proximity, from the carnal closeness of things, where the abducted soul of things become an artistic thing, an everlasting thing mummified by painting, transformed into a relic. He lays before our gaze the traces of touch: works, strokes, small pieces of oil painting that has been cut out, chromatic lines, swell splashing our faces, scent filling the humid sense-almost sexual-of our being, a dramatized scream that is restrained and laughs. The artist puts in a herculean effort in order to transform his painting into a 'record that is almost faithful, in spite of being

fictionalized- as it is every artwork transformed into language-, a record of his view of the universe.

A universe that refuses to founder despite the diaspora. And definitely, if we are here, it is because he did succeed in so doing.



We then moved on to the museum “Museum of San Juan”





At one of the museum a lady asked me to hang a poster. I am not sure if the ladies finger is pointing our giving me a finger.



It was never straight when we finished hanging it.





These birds were carved by a gentleman named Alex Rios and is an example of his skill and his passion.

[Museums in the San Juan Area and Boarding the Ship San Juan Pictures](#)

Boarding the Ship

We were told by the travel agent that our ship would be docked across the street from our hotel so we are looking to see why our ship has not docked we noticed that our ship docks at a different pier. No big issue as we just take a taxi to that pier. Staying

here at the Sheraton, in old San Juan, has been ideal for our many walking tours that we had planned.

We are still feeling great after our 7 mile hike yesterday.

Ah yes there is the ship, Just a little confusion while going through the process of boarding the ship. I did notice a booth that was selling wines/liquor bought two bottles as on board a glass of wine is \$7, too much for our taste.

The ship is like other ships we have been on. Counting this is our forth cruise: two to Hawaii, one to Alaska and now the Caribbean.

Passengers leave their bags on the dock-checked in of course and they eventually arrived at the cabin door.

As we walk through the ship we notice things like a casino, but it is closed until we leave port. There is formal dining and the Wind Jammer which is all the food a person can eat We will eat there most of the time but a few nights get all dressed up and go to formal diner, like on my birthday.

We are on the 10th floor of the ship with a room with a balcony. The bathroom can be describes as the same site as a airplane lavatory but with a shower added in the same space.

We ate well and are on deck watching as we set sail from San Juan, PR.



While on board this cruise Park-West Art Galleries/Action are holding a number of Art History/Training courses. As I have never delved into Art as such we decided to attend these sessions.



Over the course of the cruise we won one painting by Movrovich called “It Get’s better” 2015. (above) and Diana and I purchased another painting.

We purchased a painting called “Arbre – Petite 2014”. Mixed media on aluminum with sized gold or silver leaf, veined by hand (picture to be included soon).

Diana and I spend many an hour discussing the pros and cons of paintings by Thomas Kinkade. I learned about a number of artists such as Peter Max, Itzchak Tarkey, Linda Le Kinff, Yaacov Agam, and Romero Britto.

Day 4 (Dec 19, 2016) - St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgins Island

A brief history of St. Thomas

(Country - U.S.; currency U.S. Dollar)

Historians document that the first inhabitants, the Ciboneys, arrived on the islands during what is considered the Pre-Ceramic Culture. Arawaks were the next to arrive, establishing sites on St. John and St. Croix around 100 AD. Probably the best-known inhabitants, and those to arrive next, were the fierce Caribs and the more peaceful Tainos. Evidence of their time in the islands has been unearthed in recent years, and includes stone griddles, zemis (small carvings depicting the faces of their gods) and petroglyphs which are rock carvings visible on St. John’s Reef Bay Trail.

The Caribs had taken control of St. Croix, then called Ay Ay, when Christopher Columbus sailed into Salt River on his second voyage in 1493, claiming the islands for Spain. The battle between the Indians and Columbus is considered the first insurgence in the New World. After renaming the island Santa Cruz, Columbus headed north where he spotted a chain of islands. He proclaimed they would be called Las Once Mil Virgenes (11,000 virgins) in honor of Ursula, martyred by the Huns for refusing to marry a pagan prince.

A treaty with the Dutch of Brandenburg in 1685 established St. Thomas as a slave-trading post. More than 200,000 slaves, primarily from Africa's west coast, were forcibly shipped to the islands for the backbreaking work of harvesting cane, cotton and indigo. St. John and St. Croix maintained a plantation economy, while St. Thomas developed as a trade center.

After the freeing of slaves and the discovery of the sugar beet, agriculture in the islands declined. The industrial revolution ended the need for the islands as a shipping port, thus changing the economic environment. Little was heard of the islands until World War I, when the United States realized their strategic position and negotiated the purchase of the islands from Denmark for \$25 million in gold. Although the islands were purchased in 1917, it wasn't until 1927 that citizenship was granted to Virgin Islanders. Tourism grew in the destination once the United States imposed an embargo on Cuba in 1959.

[Arriving at St. Thomas](#)

As this is our first island stop on the cruise and there is a lot to do today. We were not sure what to do or how to do it and we walked a bit and looked at the various jewelry stores in St. Thomas as this is the place to be to shop. We looked at a store called Diamonds International and Diana had found some items she was interested in purchasing. As the dance between the sales person and us continued they conveniently offered a small glass of Rum as a method of relaxing the situation. It was good stuff but not sure a good idea when buying something that you will be keeping for a long time. These people were really good. One was calling Diana sweetie; "your eyes were like diamonds in the sky or some similar words". Oh brother. Diana decided to think about the purchase and walk for awhile. They will hold the pieces.



We bumped into Allie, who is the on board ship sales promoter for all the stores on the islands. She had given a sales pitch on board of what to look for as we shopped. We talked and continued on to a store called Kay's. Must be the same chain of stores I see advertised on the TV back home. There Diana found what she was looking for which was a two way necklace and a beautiful bracelet and some stud earrings.

The bracelet needed to be made a little bigger and they said they would do it and we should come back in a few hours which gave us a chance to see some more of the island. We grabbed a taxi and headed across the island to Magen's Beach. We walked on the beach and then returned and picked up the jewelry.

We were not happy with the bracelet as it was a-bit snug but they said we could have it fixed out their store on the next island.

Megan's beach

On December 28, 1946, the Municipality of St. Thomas and St. John acquired the magnificent Magens Bay Beach, and some 50 adjoining acres of grove and grass land by gift of the owner, Arthur S. Fairchild. The beach, which is more than 500 yards long, is regarded by world travelers as one of the **most magnificent** to be found anywhere. The grove contains many rare and beautiful trees.

In his 1943 Deed of Conveyance, Fairchild stipulated that Magens Bay should be "Maintained as a public park (with its natural beauty preserved) for use by the people of the Virgin Islands in perpetuity without discrimination of any kind as to race, creed, color or national origin." This unique vision has inspired those charged with its management.







Diana



Tom

[More Pictures of St. Thomas](#)

Day 5 (Dec 20, 2016) St. Maarten

(Country - Netherlands; currency Euro used on the French Side of island, Guilder used on Dutch Side and US Dollar is used both sides.)

Saint Maarten, part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, is a country on the southern part of a Caribbean island shared with Saint Martin, a French overseas collectivity. Its natural features span lagoons, beaches and salt pans. The capital, Philipsburg, has cobblestone streets and colorful, colonial-style buildings lining its Front Street shopping area. The port is a popular cruise-ship stop.

We are sailing from St. Maarten this evening heading for St. Kitts tomorrow morning. We are currently 17 degrees 19.40 minutes' north 063 degrees 08.28 minutes at 10.5 knots.

We got off on St. Maarten this morning and promptly found a tour guide that gave us a 4 hour tour of the island at a very good price.

We had an issue with some of the jewelry purchased on St. Thomas yesterday but had it fixed today on St. Maarten. The jewelry folks were a bit more understanding and worked to make sure the bracelet fit Diana to her liking. *Authors Note: **Once we returned home Diana filled out a survey of the trip including the Jewelry folks. She was not pleased at the amount of time to adjust the bracelet to her liking and said so on the survey. The jewelry company called and Diana and I agreed to change her rating of the company and she worked a deal where she got a larger set of earrings at no additional costs.***

The island of Saint Martin is technically known as both Saint-Martin and Sint Maarten; it all depends on where you're standing. The northern part of the island, which is an overseas collectivity of France, is Saint-Martin. Upon crossing the boundary into the Dutch side of the island, you have entered Sint Maarten

The 34-square mile island was split in 1648 with the signing of the Treaty of Concordia. Though the Dutch side accounts for only 39% of the island, it is more heavily populated. As of 2009, there were nearly 41,000 inhabitants in Sint Maarten compared to the almost 37,000 residents on the French side.

In addition to the name, there are other differences between the north and south side of the island. While the entire island is a popular vacation destination, the Dutch side is known for its casinos and nightlife, whereas the French side is popular for high-end shopping.

We visited the airport on St. Maarten where the aircraft landing comes in over the beach at 10 feet, awesome. [Plane landing at St. Maarten](#)

Have been taking classes on-board and have learned a great deal about art (pictures). I have had a new world open to me. I won one picture and we bought one. Wow great stuff.

Last night as there was a great deal of lighting in the distance and the ship rolled a-bit. I actually found it relaxing with the movement of the ship.

As we were riding the elevator today I posed the question to the kids. How does Santa get to you guys on this ship? There was some silence and smiles from the parents and frowns from the kids.



One of the many churches on St. Maarten





Tom holding Sea Urchins



Diana looking for Sea Urchins



The Court House on St. Maarten

[Music Show on the Ship](#)

[More pictures of St Maartin](#)

Day 6 (Dec 21, 2016) - St. Kitts

St. Kitts (Country - Independent of Saint Kitts and Nevis; currency East Caribbean dollar EC\$)

Saint Kitts, also known more formally as Saint Christopher Island, is an island in the West Indies. The west side of the island borders the Caribbean Sea, and the eastern coast faces the Atlantic Ocean. Saint Kitts and the neighboring island of Nevis constitute one country: the Federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis. Saint Kitts and Nevis are separated by a shallow 2 mile channel known as "The Narrows".

The island is one of the Leeward Islands in the Lesser Antilles. It is situated about 1,300 mi southeast of Miami, Florida. The land area of St. Kitts is about 65 sq mi, being approximately 18 miles long and on average about 5.0 miles across.

Arrived island of St. Kitts this AM via our ship from St. Maarten. St. Kitts and Nevis are a two island nation that gained independence in 1935 (maybe 1932) from England. Once we left the ship and we were awaiting our bus trip to the railroad it began to rain, what a downpour. They had us stand under a tent type enclosure for at least 15 minutes until the rain stopped.

The St. Kitts Scenic Railway took us on a 3-hour tour that makes a 30-mile circle around the beautiful Eastern Caribbean island of St. Kitts, with 18 miles by narrow gauge train. Built between 1912 and 1926 to transport sugar cane from the island's sugar plantations to the sugar factory in the capital city of Basseterre, today the "Last Railway in the West Indies" provided with an unsurpassed opportunity to experience the scenery and culture of this unspoiled country.

St. Kitts Island reminds us of a Hawaii Island as it too is volcanic in origin. The main crop of this island was sugar cane in the past as it was planted everywhere. As the world economy changed it became less import and other country and could produce it for less.

A little confusing on the driving as they drive on the left side of the road and the driver on the right where-as in St. Maarten is was driving on the left side but the driver is on the left. Glad I am not driving.

Bought some clothes today and had to get money from the ATM (in EC\$) 2.7 to 1. Good to have experience in money exchange.

Weather is warm around 85 and muggy with rain almost daily. We are prepared so we are OK with it.



This is typical landscape; it was all sugarcane until economics put an end to this crop.

[Singing on the Sugar Train](#)

[A View from the Sugar Train](#)

[More Pictures from St. Kitts](#)

Day 7 (Dec 22, 2016) - Antigua

Antigua (Country - independent nation of Antigua and Barbuda; currency East Caribbean dollar EC\$)

*Antigua also known as **Waladli** or **Wadadli** by the native population, is an island in the West Indies. It is one of the Leeward Islands in the Caribbean region and the main island of the country of Antigua and Barbuda. Antigua and Barbuda became an independent state within the Commonwealth of Nations on 1 November 1981.*

Antigua means "ancient" in Spanish after an icon in Seville Cathedral, "Sanat Maria de la Antigua" St. Mary of the Old Cathedral. The name Waladli comes from the indigenous inhabitants and means approximately "our own". The island's circumference is roughly 54 miles and its area 108 sq mi. The economy is mainly reliant on tourism, with the agricultural sector serving the domestic market.

US dollars are widely accepted. However, unless rates are posted in US dollars, as is the norm with accommodations, it usually works out better to use EC dollars. If you pay in US dollars you will likely get change in EC dollars.

We are on the road again (via ship all night) to Antigua arriving 7:15 AM in the morning. We will be doing our history lessons again with an historic walking tour.

We are the furthest east we I have been on this earth...

We arrived in St John's, Antigua this morning after having left St. John's this evening. Today is Thursday Dec 22, 2016. I know it is Thursday as each day they replace the day of the week tile on the floor of all of the elevators.

We had a two hour walking tour of St. John's downtown area. They were saying it has not rained here in 3 years but it made up for it today. We were lucky as we were in the shopping mall (food that is grown on the island) when the rained started. Wow can it rain here.

In 1968, with Barbuda and the tiny island of Redonda as dependencies, Antigua became an associated state of the Commonwealth, and in 1981 it was disassociated from Britain. The country was then led by what many describe as an elected family dynasty, with Vere C. Bird the first prime minister, having been succeeded in 1993 by Lester B. Bird, his son, who retained the post until 2004. Since March 2004 to June 12, 2014 Baldwin Spenser led the country. General elections were held and the leader of the opposition Hon. Gaston Browne's Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party won 14 of the 17 parliamentary seats. The Hon. Gaston Browne was sworn in as the fifth Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda by Governor General, Dame Louise Lake-Tack on Friday, 13 June 2014.

After the tour and on the way back to the ship we ate some local food, this went to the ship and took a nap. The heat and humidity is hard on us. After the nap we went to a comedy show called "Two Crazy Men". It was very funny and then dinner and now in the cabin at 8 PM, three hours different then ABQ.

Another craze is that we had our passports stamped in St. John's which is our first entry in our new passport books.

We are North 16 degrees 27.12 minutes West 062 degrees 07.07 minutes Speed 15.8 kts course 200 degrees...

It is so nice to see all the people on this ship from many nationalities/countries getting along together, it is truly "Christmas Time" "Good will to all"...



Its Thursday so says the elavator floor...



Many ships docked at the same place.



Prime Minister

A progressive government is implemented here as they no long buy books but buy tablets so that can update the text books with a minimum cost.



[More Pictures from Antigua](#)

Day 8 (Dec 23, 2016) - St Lucia

Saint Lucia (Country - Independent nation of Saint Lucia; currency East Caribbean dollar EC\$)

Saint Lucia is a sovereign island country in the eastern Caribbean Sea on the boundary with the Atlantic Ocean. Part of the Lesser Antilles, it is located north/northeast of the island of Saint Vincent, northwest of Barbados and south of Martinique. It covers a land area of 238.23 sq miles. Its capital is Castries.



A little harder to get her up and going today (4 cups did it)



Its Friday so says the Elevator Floor

Again our approach is to get off the ship and find the most knowledgeable taxi driver and start our tour. We found one and told him what we wanted and off we went.



Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception





The Immaculate Conception Cathedral with its huge proportions (61m long and 30m wide) make it the largest church in the Caribbean and home to the Archdiocese.. It was proclaimed a Basilica in 1999 to mark the 100-year anniversary of its construction. It is certainly an atypical church as few you've ever seen. It has a metal frame covered with a wooden ceiling which is full of murals. The exterior is made of stone, and the bell tower is located at your feet. There are three halls and its walls are entirely decorated with frescoes which depict various biblical scenes by the local artist Dunstan St. Omer

We are off to see the Pitons via taxi first stopping to view the town of Canaries



Canaries is located on the West Coast of Saint Lucia. It is a small fishing village and it is nestled along the West Coast road, between Anse La Raye and Soufriere, and there are scenic views from both the Northern and Southern approaches.

Until the 1960s there was no road transport to the village and it was only accessible by boat. Since the construction of the West Coast Road it is a stop on the road between Castries and Soufriere.



A view from the sea



The Pitons are two volcanic plugs in a World Heritage Site in St. Lucia, linked by the Piton Mitan ridge. The two Piton Mountains are the most photographed landmark on the island. The larger of these two volcanic plugs is called the Gros Piton, while the other is the Petit Piton. Our next stop is the [Diamond Falls Botanical Gardens](#), a six acre multi-award winning tourism site, is an attractive, alluring and peaceful retreat from the outside world. Enjoy the beauty and sultry warmth of the tropics whilst walking through lush fertile vegetation and marveling at the diverse range of tropical flowers and plant life. You have just stepped into a world with a breathtaking waterfall, hot mineral springs fill the historical baths with age old medicinal waters ad flora and fauna abounds.

The Diamond Falls Botanical Gardens is both a historic and a naturally beautiful site. A haven for birds and insects, which gives one a true nature experience not to be duplicated anywhere within the Caribbean.











[More pictures of St. Lucia](#)

We have seen many museums concerning the slave trade so logically the subject of how were the slaves captured in Africa.

There were several different Slave trades operating in Africa:

The internal slave trade: this was the African practice of using criminals, prisoners of war, weaker conquered tribes, etc, as slaves. This was huge - in some African nations up to 50% of the population were slaves.

The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade: this was run by Arabic slavers, who mounted armed expeditions to attack villages, rounding the inhabitants up at gunpoint and killing any who resisted. They used Baluchi mercenaries - originally from Iran - as hired muscle. They took their prisoners across the Sahara to the Barbary Coast nations of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, and into the Ottoman Empire.

The Indian Ocean Slave trade: The Muslim nations of East Africa, as well as keeping slaves themselves, sold on their criminals and prisoners-of-war through the Omani Arab slavemarkets of Zanzibar.

From there, they would be sold across the middle-east.

When Europeans started to get involved, for the first time, Africans were able to make a real profit from their slaves. Any chief who was willing to co-operate would get rich on trade goods (usually cheap trinkets and low-grade cloth which cost the Europeans very little) and could become powerful with European muskets. This meant that - as well as selling their prisoners to the Europeans - it was worth going out and capturing more.

The tribes which were more aggressive in the slave trade soon became wealthier and more powerful than their neighbors... and as soon as that happened, those neighbors got conquered and sold. Basically - as long as the Europeans paid them and gave them firearms, the Africans were only too keen to do the actual capturing.

An African could be captured by Africans... transported across the country in a 'coffle' (slave convoy) run by Africans, sold by an African trader operating on behalf of an African chief, and held in a 'barracoon' (slave prison) run entirely by Africans, until a ship arrived,

The men on that ship would be the first white faces involved in the process. Up to that point, it was often an all-African operation.

As they folks had to survive capture and the long trip in the holes of ships on the strongest survived. It's probably the reason that many folks now in America are stronger in sports than their fellow Americans.

Day 9 (Dec 24, 2016) - Barbados

Barbados (Country - Independent nation of Barbados; currency Barbados Dollar BBD)

Barbados is a sovereign island country in the Lesser Antilles, in the Americas. It is 21 miles in length and up to 14 mi in width, covering an area of 167 sq miles. It is situated in the western area of the North Atlantic and 62 mi east of the Windward Islands and the Caribbean Sea; therein, it is about 104 mi east of the islands of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and 250 mi north-east of Trinidad and Tobago. Barbados is outside of the principal Atlantic hurricane belt. Its capital is Bridgetown. Barbados is 1,600 miles Southeast of Miami.

The Barbados Dollar is converted at the rate of \$1.98 BDS to \$1.00 U.S. The Barbados Dollar is fixed to the U.S Dollar and does not fluctuate. Its rate to other currencies fluctuates daily based on their fluctuations relative to the U.S. Dollar.

Arrived this AM. We as usual got off the ship and looked for a taxi cab driver that had some knowledge of the area. We wanted to see where George Washington stayed as a younger man and tour the museum of Barbados.



We are on the island of Barbados



Diana watching the ship dock



We took a taxi over to this museum and while passing the location where George Washington stayed. The Washington portion was closed but the museum was open. We agreed to have the taxi driver come back for us in 2 hours. He came back right on-time.

We took a taxi over to this museum and while passing the location where George Washington stayed. The Washington portion was closed but the museum was open. We agreed to have the taxi driver come back for us in 2 hours. He came back right on-time.

Even before the United States of America became a nation, its residents enjoyed visits to the islands of the Caribbean. George Washington took his only trip outside colonial America in a visit to Barbados in 1751, 15 years before he became the first president of the new republic. Barbados was then a British colony and the American colonists had not yet separated from the mother country they shared with Barbados.



Views of the museum



Back at the Ship

[More Pictures of Barbados](#)

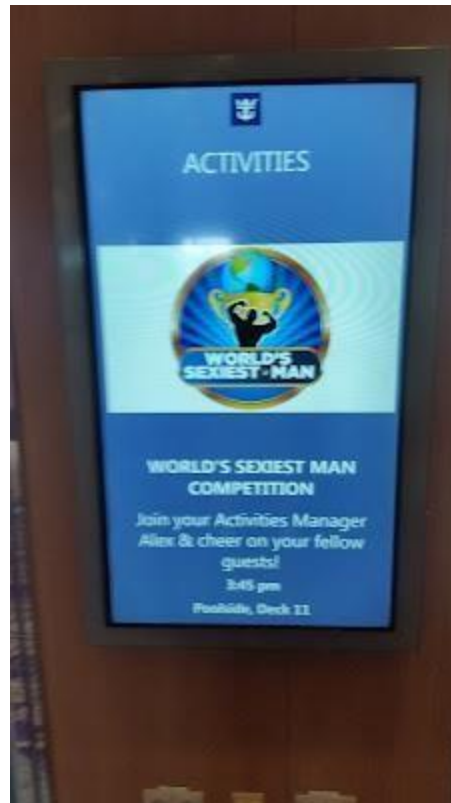
Day 10 (Dec 25, 2016) - Cruising all Day

Left Barbados last evening at 4 PM or so and we saw the docks go by. When we came out of show "Mo Town" about 8 PM we wondered why people were looking over the side of the ship. There had been a medical emergency and the ship had returned to the dock to take someone off. I never felt the ship turn around.

We lost a few hours but we had 36 hours to get back to San Juan. The average speed was 16.3 knots throughout the 36 hour back to San Juan.



Facts about the ship



Diana wanted to attend this event

[The Sea is Rough](#)



A poor quality pictures of the lighting of the Menorah

Lots of different activities all around the ship including midnight mass. We elected to attend the 9:30 mass on Christmas day. It was a short mass where the priest was from somewhere in South America and spoke decent English. Walking to communion I felt like a drunken sailor as the seas were choppy that morning. They were saying 10 foot waves.

We were required to watch a video on how to disembark from the ship. If you wanted to get off at 7 AM then you had to get your bags to the theater as they would not assist. Others wanting to get off at 7:20 and later should leave their bags outside their cabins and they would be delivered to you dockside in the morning. We needed to get off early as our flight was at 9:40 AM. Did cause some worry during the night.

Day 11 (Dec 26, 2016) - Heading home

The ship cruised all night and delivered us to San Juan on time Monday morning. We had gotten up at 5:00 AM Atlantic time and were off the ship and at the airport (via taxi) an hour early. Nice feeling.



Diana at the airport ready to board the plane

We had good flight from San Juan to Miami to Dallas to Albuquerque arriving at 5 PM. It is sad to be home but grateful for a most wonderful time. Diana had been alerted via her phone that there was a charge from Las Vegas posted to her credit card and we were on the Caribbean. As I drove she called the credit card company and they agreed it was a fraudulent charge.

Arrived home and greeted by the dogs and the dog sitter Madison. She had done a fantastic job while we were away.

Final Notes:

You many have noticed that there are not a lot of pictures of beaches/snorkling and setting in the sun. Diana and I have snorkeled in some of the most beautiful places in the world and we do not take kindly to setting in the sun as we become red as lobsters.

As we meet people and if they spoke Spanish to use we would automatically response in French. Neither of us have had French since our school days. Interesting how the mind works.

While onboard the ship it was so wonderful to see people from all walks of life getting along with each other. "Peace on Earth, Good Will to Man"