

Rich and Maxine's Caribbean Adventure, Regent Seven Seas Navigator, Feb. 2007



This was an exciting itinerary for us, because we visited some of our favorite spots (San Juan, US Virgin Islands), but also get to experience new places. For both of us, St. Barts, the Dominican Republic, Princess Cays on Eleuthera (Bahamas), and Grand Turk were brand new. Early rough weather forced changes in the itinerary, but those changes were all for the better. [Picture: Navigator docked at Grand Turk Island. Our cabin was on the 8th deck, port side.]

Rich's job, in exchange for the free cruise for two, was to present three lectures. He created PowerPoint presentations using pictures come from our previous travels, plus a few historical illustrations and maps. He also incorporated humorous elements

using pictures of the ship's staff. Yes, it is exhausting having to give three 35 minute lectures in 11 days, but Rich was up to the task.

Rich is on research leave, creating a registry of places for his "Preserve the Caribbean Past" project. Here's the gist of it: The Caribbean holds a treasure trove of historic sites, colonial-era buildings, archeological sites, museums, and other endangered places and spaces. By compiling a workable site list, we can assist Caribbean officials develop preservation plans, seek grants and private sources, identify appropriate history professionals, and save some of these special places for future generations to enjoy. The oldest Caribbean treasures are coral reefs, reefs, bays, and other underwater features may be nominated as well. The registry page uses wiki technology, so people can simply click on the edit page box to add locations. The site is linked from Rich's home range at <http://www.cowboyprof.com>.

We met lots of very nice folks on the cruise—Frieda, a retired physician from San Francisco, Dick and Margaret Ann from Fayetteville, NC, a few NC State alums, and many more. With open seating for dinner, we met more people than on cruises where you have assigned tables. Speaking of dinners, service and food are divine. The cruise is all inclusive, so we ate and drank too much of everything, and loved every minute of it. Usual breakfast: Big plate of fresh fruit, including mangos, passionfruit, berries, melons, grapefruit, oranges, as well as dried fruit. Maxine added a pancake and tea; Rich added bacon, sausage, and strong, black coffee. At noon, we enjoyed a sit-down multi-course lunch or sandwiches via room service if we missed the lunch seating.

Big-time 7-course dinners, but small servings, so we could sample lots of food without bloating. Red and white wine available for lunch and dinner. Lots of good seafood a plus, especially for Rich: halibut, tuna, sole, lobster, salmon, creative seafood appetizers! Beef in all forms, duckling, venison, pleasant pheasant (like chicken), roast duckling, rack of lamb, and many pasta dishes. Maxine, not the best of sailors, did rely on Bonine to help steady her sea legs.

We make our first stop, Monday, Feb. 19 at Grand Turk. This small island has great snorkeling, but unfortunately high winds and surf kept us out of the water. Rich made contact with local museum and historic preservation folks. Their local museum includes artifacts from the oldest shipwreck found so far in the Western Hemisphere. Large salt pans, once worked by slaves, still produce industrial-quality salt.

On Tue, Feb. 20th, we had a day at sea and Rich did his first PowerPoint lecture, “The Many Caribbeans,” an illustrated tour of the multi-cultural Caribbean, highlighting indigenous, African, and a variety of European contributions to food, music, history, architecture, and more. Rich lectured to about 65 people and got 8 or so good questions (one of which he could not answer) during the 10-minute Q&A.

We docked Wed. morning Feb. 21 right in front of Old San Juan, Puerto Rico, with buildings dating from the 1500s. We spent several hours locating and photographing famous sites. Then in late afternoon we met with Phil and Carmita Sumpter. Phil is a sculptor who will do larger-than-life depictions of Latin American cowboys for an exhibit in Old San Juan. Rich is providing support for historical accuracy. They introduced us to Don Ricardo Alegría, a prominent Puerto Rican scholar, age 85. Rich and Don Ricardo discussed historic preservation needs in the Caribbean and a host of other topics. The Sumpters then treated us to a “typico” seafood dinner at a San Juan restaurant and retired to the ship—exhausted—about 9PM. At 11PM we sailed. Phil also gave us an original bas-relief sculpture of a gaucho’s head—very nice and unique.



Arrived Thur. morning Feb 22 at Road Town, Tortola, US Virgin Islands. It’s a sleepy little place, so Maxine scoped out jewelry (no purchases this time), and we hunted without success for the little folklore museum. Alas, our planned snorkel at the Baths in Virgin Gorda did not happen for lack of customers. Very old demographic for this cruise, so not many takers for water activities. After a few hours, we headed back to the ship for rest (Rich did laundry) and, of course, more good meals. Sailed at 6PM.

Arrived Fri. morning Feb. 23 in Philipsburg, capital of the Dutch side of St. Maarten, and hit the dock for our “Power Snorkeling” trip. A bus took us to the French side of the island, a beautiful mile-long beach on Oriente Bay. The ‘power’ in this trip is a small a battery-run fan that you hold onto [the yellow and blue thing in Rich’s hand]. It pulls you through the water as you snorkel. Remember the old James Bond movie with the underwater fight scene? Well, that’s the idea, but MUCH smaller and slower. Unfortunately, the reef around this beautiful bay is virtually dead. No colored corals and almost no fish—mostly seagrass. So we enjoyed the novelty of the hardware, but as a snorkel, this one is a 1 on a scale of 10. Had a late room service lunch on our balcony (10-minute service!). To add injury to insult, Maxine got an ear infection, so a visit to the infirmary and antibiotics for her.



Saturday Feb. 24 we arrived at Gustavia, capital of St. Barts. Sweden once owned the island, hence the name of the capital. Historic building markers in Swedish, French, and English. We did a walkabout looking for and spotting historical buildings. Museum closed unfortunately, but the town has a lovely little “Shell Beach” only a five-minute walk away. Sunday the 25th we

arrived in the scenic port of Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands. Maxine slept all day, nursing her middle ear infection. Rich headed out on his own. Lots of changes since the last visit. They have developed a delightful heritage tour starting at Blackbeard's tall castle. The tour features four houses, dating from the early 1800s, each furnished with period crystal, china, and furniture. Rich also enjoyed viewing and photographing more than a dozen near-life-size bronze statues of famous pirates.



Another overnight sail left us on the north side of the Dominican Republic at Samaná Bay on Monday Feb. 26. We boarded a tender over to Cayo Levantado, an island in this large bay. There we boarded a boat to look for humpback whales, which give birth to their young in the protection of the bay. We spotted various spots and brief surfacings. But after about an hour, we spotted a momma and baby lounging on the surface. We spent half an hour watching these remarkable mammals just a few feet from the ship. Another whale breached high out of the water right in front of our craft! This was a true trip highlight.

Tuesday the 27th found us at sea all day, cruising westward toward the Bahamas. Rich gave his second section on pirates that morning, drawing better than 100 listeners. "Pirates Ravage the Atlantic Seaboard, 1600s-1800s," provides portraits of many pirates as well as the sites of their attacks on the Atlantic coast of what is now the US. By now we knew lots of folks, so we generally took meals with people we know.

Our last day at sea, Wed. Feb. 28, we stopped at Princess Cays, a private beach on the south end of Eleuthera in the Bahamas. We enjoyed two hours of good snorkeling right along the beach. Ironical that our best outing cost us nothing extra. We saw lots of fish, often in schools, and a pretty good range of corals. About 6 on a scale of 10 but by far the views on this trip. Ate a beachside BBQ of steak, ribs, sausage, chicken, salad, and fruit, and then took a tender back to the ship. At 4:30 in the afternoon, Rich presented his Latin American/Caribbean Food Quiz, a humorous, audience-participation "test" over which foods originated in the Americas and which did not. Many foods origins surprised the crowd. Most thought coffee came from Latin America—nope—probably Ethiopia.

Last day, Thur. Mar 1, began with some frustration. We had to be out of our cabins at 8AM so ate an early breakfast. However it took US immigration officials another 1.5 hours to clear the ship, so we sat and waited—getting a little panicky about missing our flight. However, once off the ship, we zipped through immigration and customs, took a quick 15-minute taxi ride to the airport and again zipped right through to our gate, with time for a hotdog lunch. Our noon flight was overbooked, so we agreed to take a later 3PM flight, in exchange for \$800 in travel vouchers and free lunch. The airport also has free wifi, so we popped open the laptop computer and caught up on our email.

Except for Maxine's first-day seasickness and subsequent ear infection, we had a glorious trip. The flight vouchers also made it ridiculously cheap for us. Can't complain!