



From San Francisco to Fort Lauderdale via The Panama Canal



A long held dream to transit the Panama Canal finally came to fruition and what an experience it was!

Day 1 From home to San Francisco, California

After an early start with a taxi transfer to Manchester Airport, we checked in our luggage before the short flight with Lufthansa to Frankfurt where we boarded our connecting plane to San Francisco. Our luggage would automatically be transferred and by changing planes in Europe this meant we only had to clear customs at one U.S. airport. We upgraded to Premium Economy class at a supplement, but the wider seats with more leg room ensured a comfortable flight during the 11 hour journey. The service on board was excellent with meals, snacks and drinks included, along with a good choice of in-seat entertainment we could doze off to.



We were greeted at the airport by a very friendly Princess Cruises Representative who made sure that we found our transfer transport easily. We stayed overnight at an hotel not far from the airport- The Doubletree by Hilton- from where we took a complimentary bus to nearby Burlingame, a small town with shops, restaurants and bars where we dined.



Day 2 On Board the Island Princess

Following a comfortable night's sleep and a hearty breakfast, we crossed over the road from the hotel and strolled part of the pretty Bay Trail before our transfer bus took us to the Port Of San Francisco passing Fisherman's Wharf en route. Once on board the ship we were able to enter our state room straight away. It was a very comfortable, spacious mini suite and as we drank our welcome glass of champagne on the balcony we could see the island of Alcatraz, the Coit Tower and in the distance, the world renowned Golden Gate Bridge under which we would later sail with great excitement as we started our adventure.

Days 3,4, At Sea

With so much to do on this beautiful ship, the days at sea enabled us to become acquainted with the location of restaurants, bars, entertainment venues and the all-important shops! You could be as active or as relaxed as you wanted on board because though the programme was packed with optional activities, there were also numerous spaces where you could be quiet and away from it all.

That evening we opted for a meal in one of the speciality restaurants- 'Sabatini's' for a more intimate atmosphere and enjoyed a wonderful meal.



Day 5 Cabo San Lucas, Mexico

As we approached Cabo San Lucas we were struck by the beauty of the location with its unique rock formations and crystal blue waters. A short tender ride took us to the quayside and we joined our group of 15 to board the Zodiac boat to go whale watching. It was a thrilling and exhilarating ride with the boat handler zooming from one location to another in search of whales. To see the whales breaching and diving so close to the boat was awesome and will long live in the memory. There was also time after the excursion to have a stroll around the resort and stop in a bar for tortillas with guacamole and a Corona!

Days 6,7,8 At sea

Relaxing on the sunbeds in a quiet part of the lido deck reading our books was just what the doctor ordered! We attended the interesting port lectures in the Princess Theatre which gave us useful insights into what to look for and expect in the ports of call. We also paid a supplement to take part in a wine tasting event hosted by the maître d' who could gain employment as a stand-up comedian if needed!

Though our Anytime Dining venue – The Bordeaux Restaurant- provided excellent service and meals, we spent a further evening in a speciality restaurant. This time the Bayou was our choice and as we enjoyed our steaks and lobster we could also enjoy the live singer/ musician in the venue.

Day 9 San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua

This is another tender port and for our excursion we opted for a visit to Granada with lunch, a folkloric show and some island highlights. Tourism is a growing industry in this country and we were made very welcome by our enthusiastic guide. After seeing some of the brightly-coloured colonial buildings in the city we were then taken to see Lake Nicaragua- a huge water feature of 99 miles in length, and then the Apoyo lagoon before seeing 2 of the large volcanos on the island. It's a great place for photography enthusiasts with views at every turn. We arrived back quite late to the port but because it was a Princess excursion we had no fear that the ship would sail without us! Shortly after our arrival the ship set sail with a beautiful sunset in the distance.



Day 10 Puntarenas, Costa Rica

Costa Rica is the happiest place on earth apparently according to a survey, and the smiles on the faces of the people we met would back up that statement. This time our excursion choice was a coach and scenic train journey through the pretty green countryside followed by a river boat safari in search of crocodiles. Our tour guide was very experienced and informative, pointing out a whole host of bird varieties in their natural habitats and of course- crocodiles!



Day 11 At Sea

More relaxation, reading and today a lunch in the restaurant with waiter service rather than our usual choice for lunch of the Horizon Court self-service venue. After a couple of evening cocktails we settled down for an early night, setting the alarm to wake us at dawn to see the full transit of the canal.



Day 12 Transit of the Panama Canal

5.30 a.m. and though still dark, we could already see the lights of ships preparing to enter the Panama Canal. There was great excitement on board with people already in place for the best camera shots. As dawn broke, the ship sailed under the Bridge of The Americas and we entered the first series of locks in this amazing feat of engineering, marvelling at its size and how momentous a journey this was. Four hours later, we re- entered our cabin, now wearing our commemorative Panama Canal tee-shirts and awaited our special Deluxe Breakfast at a supplementary cost. This was served on our balcony by a friendly butler and consisted of a range of delights along with a bottle of fizz. It was memorable to dine while watching the picturesque scenery and further locks- befitting of this bucket list occasion!

Day 13 Cartagena, Columbia



The modern skyscraper buildings of Cartagena greeted us as we approached the port in Columbia but our excursion choice in this port focussed on the old, picturesque area. It was very busy with 3 other cruise ships in port and a visit from the President taking place so we were once again very glad that we had a guide to escort us on our tour.

The narrow streets with balconies were reminiscent of York and at every turn there was an ornate, colourful building to admire. We visited the fort for a photo stop and Las Bovedas, once dungeons and now a shopping area. Some fellow passengers had opted for a horse-drawn tour which looked great fun.

Day 14 Oranjestadt, Aruba

You could sense the cosmopolitan feel of this resort from the ship- clearly an island of greater wealth than some of the locations we had visited. This time our excursion was a mix of scenic highlights such as the Natural Bridge, California Lighthouse and rugged coastline which our knowledgeable tour guide/driver was proud to show us before relaxation time on one of the white sandy beaches then heading back to the pier where we were able to purchase some souvenirs before boarding the ship for the last time.



Days 15 and 16 At Sea

We were now in such a relaxed frame of mind that leaving the sundeck to pack for our return journey was left until the very last minute and not before making a brief stop at the retail area where we purchased some photographs taken by the ship's photographers and the dress my wife had coveted since early on in the cruise! Our cases were efficiently collected late in the evening after our final meal in the restaurant with the traditional Baked Alaska procession by the waiters and a couple of final cocktails in some of the bars.



Day 17 Port Everglades, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Because our flight back to the U.K. was departing late in the afternoon we made the very wise decision to take a pre-flight excursion to the Everglades after disembarking which would also take us to the airport for early afternoon, along with our luggage which was safely stored in the coach throughout. Another first for us was the airboat ride along the river to see alligators and yet more wildlife before

visiting the aptly named Flamingo Gardens with its varieties of animals and colourful flamingos. Our guide and driver informed us very clearly about where to go upon arrival at Miami airport and were extremely helpful, making our final day so much less stressful than it might have been if faced with a lengthy wait at the airport.

The 8 hour flight back to Frankfurt seemed short compare with our lengthy flight to San Francisco but allowed us time to rest and reflect upon what had been a wonderful holiday which ticked every box and even exceeded our expectations.

Panama Canal (New Locks) With Costa Rica & Caribbean

29th November 2017

10 nights – Caribbean Princess

Highlights include: Fly from Manchester to Miami and visit Fort Lauderdale, Princess Cays, Cartagena, Panama Canal, Colon, Limon, Grand Cayman, Fort Lauderdale, Return Flight to Manchester

Interior stateroom from **£1609**pp

BALCONY stateroom from **£1999**pp

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1 night pre-cruise stay in Miami/Fort Lauderdale area
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