A GRAND WORLD CRUISE

A Couple's Guide to Planning, Surviving, and Loving an Ocean Voyage Around the World Captain Michael Dodd

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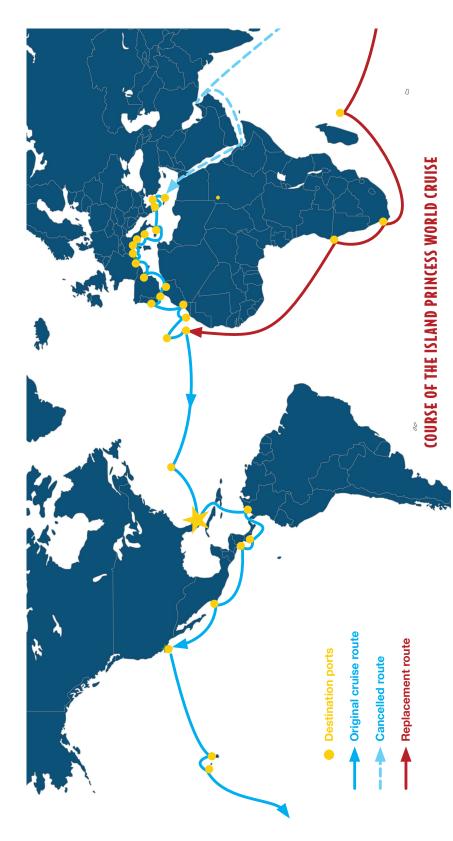
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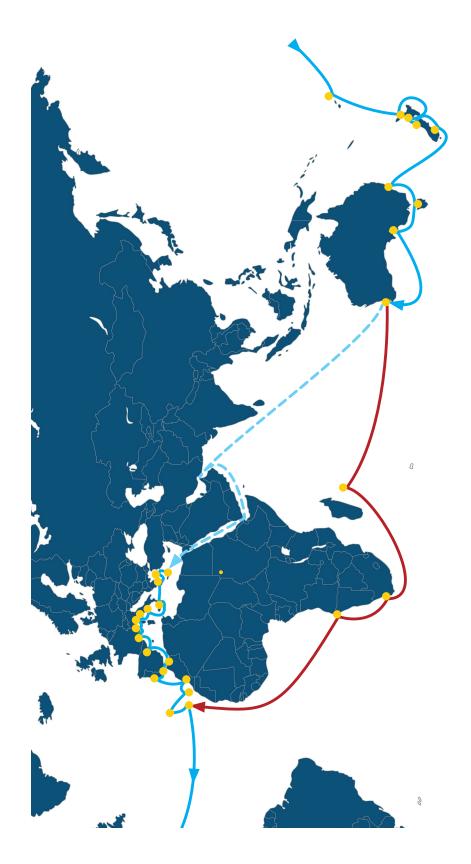
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CAPTAIN MICHAEL DODD



Note: the conflict between Israel and Hamas in the fall of 2023 closed the Red Sea to passenger vessels. The original planned route of the Island Princess is shown as a dotted line from Perth, up the Red Sea to Kusadasi. The actual route went from Perth to Cape Town and up the West Coast of Africa. For details see page 47.



This book is dedicated to the many officers, crew and staff who care for the passengers all over the world on cruise ships. I particularly want to thank the staff and crew of the *Island Princess* who served us so well over the 111-day circumnavigation of the world in 2024.



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As we stood on the deck of the *Island*Princess, champagne in hand, we watched the Ft. Lauderdale skyline fade into the evening glow. We laughed in amazement, half joy, half disbelief, at our bold decision to circle the planet in 111 days. What adventures lay before us?

We toasted, "To the world," and touched glasses.



⇒ Introduction ≪

THE THOUGHT OF A CRUISE around the world can be somewhat intimidating for the faint of heart. Perhaps it should be. The initial impulse to engage in such an undertaking is the desire to explore various world ports, to enjoy the pleasures and entertainment on a cruise ship, and to interact with a large array of unique people. If this desire is absent, the endeavor is over before it begins. Once you have proceeded beyond this stage, the rest is actually quite manageable and can follow a logical process. Considerations usually include cost, itinerary, duration, and cruise line.

My wife, Maureen, and I sailed on the *Island Princess* during the winter/spring of 2024. Before I get into the details of our particular trip, I will discuss the considerations mentioned above and offer some wisdom that may assist the reader in their own decision-making process. The best news is that the cost of cabins includes all meals, all shows and access to most activities on board.

Cost is likely to be the biggest obstacle for many potential cruisers. The price of any cruise is largely dependent on the size of the ship's cabins and their location on the ship. Most cabins are designed for couples. Single cabins are available, of course, but are higher in cost per capita than for couples. Like a hotel room, the basic minimum cabin format is a sleeping area, a closet and a bathroom. The lowest cost cabins are located on the inside core of the ship with no windows. Personally, I

would not consider this option for a world cruise or even a cruise of three weeks. At a minimum, I need a window to keep track of the horizon and daylight. On short cruises, my wife and I have stayed in a small cabin with no window.

The next cabin up in cost is one with a window, but no balcony or verandah. If you desire a small verandah, this adds cost to the basic room. For a world cruise, I recommend a verandah. You can watch the sunrise or sunset, have a cocktail in the breeze, watch the docking process, look at the moon and stars, have a meal al fresco, or simply sit out and read on your own little private space with a view. Naturally, there are subtypes. Some verandahs have views which are obstructed by a lifeboat or ladder. These are a bit less expensive than those with unobstructed views. Most verandah cabins measure about 200 square feet. Then there are larger rooms of 300 to 400 square feet with larger verandahs. These large cabins are a wise choice for a world cruise since one tends to bring more clothes and supplies. Larger cabins with verandahs are typically referred to as suites. Suites are quite expensive, typically over \$100,000 for a world cruise. The most luxurious are "owner's suites" and may have living room and dining areas, more than one bedroom and a large wrap-around verandah. These suites may be located overlooking the bow or stern of the ship. For a world cruise these can range up to \$200,000 or more. For our circumnavigation cruise during the winter of 2023 on the Island Princess, we chose a "mini suite" that was located far forward on the port side and had an eight by ten-foot verandah. The dimensions of the cabin measured about 320 square feet. It had a walk-in closet and a small living area adjacent to the bed, with sofa, table and extra chair. There was considerable storage in this mini-suite, and it met our needs perfectly.

The next cost variable is the location of the cabin on the ship. The least expensive cabins are positioned on the lower decks. Within that category, there is still cost variation with the more expensive cabins in the middle of the ship whereas forward and aft cabins will be slightly less expensive because of the motion of the ship in rough weather. Travelers prone to seasickness want to stay in the middle of the ship where up and down motion is minimal. Cabins with better views, located higher up, are more expensive than those on lower decks.

The other cost variable is under the category of amenities. Each cruise line is different, so it's vital to be certain about what you are purchasing. Some cruise lines include all amenities (round trip airfare, wi-fi, drink packages, laundry, upscale meals and gratuities) in the cost of the cabin. Complete packages are offered on the most expensive cruise lines such as Reagent, Seabourne, Oceania, Viking and others. Other cruise lines offer a basic cabin price to which you can add those amenities noted above. We typically make our own flight reservations and use points to pay.

Wi-fi is critical for most travelers. It is one amenity we always pay for if it is not included. With our mini-suite on the *Island Princess*, the cost of Wi-fi was included. It was the best Wi-fi of any cruise ship I have been on. We had no interruptions in service anywhere on the globe.

Gratuities are important. In general, on our many cruises, the staff service has been excellent. The workers are dedicated to keeping their guests happy. They spend up to nine months per year on the ships. They deserve a little extra compensation. Most cruise lines will make a recommendation for gratuities. Some include the recommended gratuity in the cabin fare. The easiest way is to take the recommendation of the cruise

line and pay up front. Alternately, guests may target individuals who gave them special care. For example, the steward who cleans your cabin may deserve a bonus. Therefore, some passengers elect to pay those who work directly with them rather than contribute to the collective gratuity. It is up to the individual.

Most cruise lines offer drink packages. I never purchase a drink package. I am happy to have water with dinner every night and perhaps have a cocktail before dinner once or twice a week and pay for it at the time of purchase. This offers tremendous savings. On our world cruise we saved around \$12,000 by avoiding the drink package. For those who get the drink package, there may be a tendency to consume as much alcohol as possible to justify the cost. Some drink packages offered eight to twelve cocktails per day. No thanks.

Another issue regarding cost that is not often talked about has to do with port taxes and fees paid by the cruise lines each time a ship pulls into a port. These fees are wrapped in the cabin fee paid by each traveler. There is only one way for cruise lines to reduce these fees: dock at fewer ports. You, of course, have no direct control, but you do have choices. There are world cruises where the ship may stop at only twenty ports. There are other cruises where the ship may stop at sixty ports or more. You can guess which cruise will have the higher cabin fees. So, if a ship is calling on fewer ports, that means there is more time at sea. If you don't mind spending extra time at sea and enjoying the luxurious amenities on board, and don't care about visiting many ports, you can find such a cruise and save a bundle. During my research for the world cruise, I discovered that Cunard ships typically call on fewer ports and have the best prices for world cruises. For example, the Queen Mary 2

world cruise was about ninety days. Our *Island Princess* world cruise was one-hundred-eleven days. The *QM2* makes fewer stops and therefore is less expensive for a similar cabin.

One final issue to consider with cruise costs is that of booking through a travel agent. For the multiple cruises we have taken, we have not used a travel agent. We typically book directly with the cruise line. With the first contact made with any cruise line, whether by phone or email, they assign an in-house agent to lead you through the process and help you choose the best options. One presumes that the agent will find the best prices and fulfill the customer's wishes. We have found this to be the case in most circumstances. Our typical cruises have been for less than three weeks. One minor downside is that you will be placed on the cruise line mailing list and may receive mailings from them for all eternity. And apparently some cruise lines share mailing lists, so you may receive mailings from others who are subsidiaries. The advantage is that you will be up to date on the best bargains and can sign up quicker than cruisers who are not on such mailing lists.

For our one-hundred-eleven-day circumnavigation of the earth, we decided to use a travel agent. A passenger I met on another cruise recommended Cruise Specialists of Seattle, Washington. They have experienced agents.

What are the advantages of using a travel agent? First, all information passes through them, and they make reservations and help with preparations. You fill out their basic form, including passport information, and they maintain it on file. Henceforth, they can quickly assist you with future cruises. Second, they have experience with many cruise lines and can make recommendations and reservations based upon your destinations and preferences. Third, if problems arise, they

are there to assist. Things like lost bags, or even worse, a lost passport can be very disruptive. For example, on our world cruise, one of the guides had their passport stolen the day of boarding. Cruise Specialists arranged for immediate transportation to the nearest city where a new passport could be issued and put the guide up in a hotel until the new passport was issued. They flew her to the next port of call for our journey, and she successfully re-boarded the ship. It is with this type of situation that a travel agent can be worth their weight in gold.

Finally, an agent can help with many logistical issues, including how much insurance to purchase, how to obtain visas, which land tours you should not miss, the best deals on cabins and information about which onboard packages are most sensible. Best of all, passengers typically do not pay travel agents. Their fees are paid by the cruise line for filling up cabins. Our travel agency also offered many benefits for our long cruise. For example, we were booked at a local hotel free of charge one night before boarding. Our cruise departed on January 4, and it may have been risky for us to fly out of a northern city on the morning of departure because of the possibility of inclement weather. We appreciated this opportunity to stay in our departure city, Ft. Lauderdale, one day early. In addition, our travel agent had a complimentary cocktail party and dinner at the hotel so we could meet the guides who accompanied us for the trip's duration and meet the other passengers joining us on the cruise. They also arranged to have a bus take our group to the terminal to the exact place where we were to drop off bags and begin boarding. In addition, they had gifts for us. This included a nice cruise bag that had a cell-phone battery charger inside. We were treated to a pair of excursions during the cruise at no cost. After one week on board, the

guides arranged for a cocktail party for everyone in our group of about thirty guests. Finally, halfway through the cruise they arranged a tour of the ship's bridge. We would have received none of these perks if we made our own reservations.

My cut off for using an agent is a journey of three weeks or more and involvement of many foreign countries.

One final note on money-saving ideas. There are online companies that specialize in low-cost fares for ships, much like airlines. People that have flexibility could save considerable money. For example, if one can accept a cruise on short notice, there are considerable savings. We met a retired couple who have grown children, no pets and kept their bags always packed. If they get a call on a Monday to cruise on a Wednesday, they will often accept it and depart quickly. Also, they will accept any cabin assigned to them at considerable savings. In this situation, one cannot be fussy about where on the ship the cabin is located.

Also, there is a popular online company for discounted cruises: vacationstogo.com.

One word about around-the-world cruises. The *Island Princess* cruise we took was literally and factually scheduled to go "around the world." It departed from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida and returned to the same port after three-and-a-half months of circumnavigating the planet. There are other cruises titled "world cruises." These do not necessarily circumnavigate the globe. Rather they are two or three-month cruises that concentrate on certain parts of the world. For example, a cruise may depart from Los Angeles and cruise to Hawaii, then to Japan, China, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand then back to Los Angeles. Though a long cruise, it is not truly around the world.

In conclusion, there are ways to save money if you choose to travel on a world cruise. We chose the assistance of a travel agent, Cruise Specialists. It turned out to be a wise decision.

⇒ TIP €

Good deals are out there. Carry out your due diligence to research for the best price.

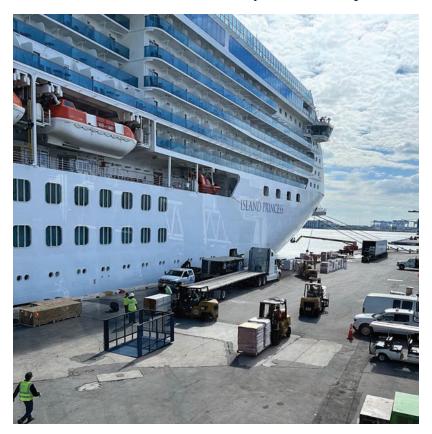
➤ The Ship: Island Princess <</p>

THE ISLAND PRINCESS IS A 965-foot cruise ship which can accommodate 2,200 passengers and 900 crew members. She is registered in Bermuda. As we approached the stunning, bright white ship tied up at Terminal A in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, we could not help being astonished at the beauty and size of the vast machine. She appeared more like a building lying on her side that offered no clue how such a large object might float. She was pure white with blue accents and appeared to have been recently cleaned and scrubbed. Her iconic blue logo was artfully painted on the bow of the ship on the freeboard (area between the water line and the deck). The logo is the metaphoric face of a youthful maiden with thick hair blowing backward and mimicking the undulating action of ocean waves. The ship glistened and sparkled in the sunlight as vans and forklifts, loaded with stacks of cargo, delivered all varieties of supplies into her gigantic, gaping spaces. She sat proudly in the water with many lines holding her securely to the dock.

Additional statistics of the *Island Princess* include a beam (width) of 106 feet at the waterline, and a draft (depth below waterline) of 25.5 feet. These dimensions allow her to tightly squeeze through the Panama Canal.

She has 16 decks reaching a height of 204 feet from the waterline to the top of her masts, and she weighs in at 91,627 tons (displacement). The massive size of this ship allows her to plow through wind and waves with little impact. She also has

a large wing-like stabilizer on each side below the water line to keep her stable when wind or seas push her on the side or seas get rough. She was built in France and was launched on July 2, 2002, then refurbished in 2019. Her safe cruising speed is 20 knots (about 23 mph—the conversion factor is: 1.15 x knots = miles per hour). She is like a floating city on the sea. The Princess Cruise Line is owned by Carnival Corporation.



Island Princess taking on supplies in Ft. Lauderdale

There is an important point about how the *Island Princess* approaches the issue of cleanliness on board. Since the Covid pandemic of 2020, all cruise lines have taken precautions to keep their guests and staff healthy and to reduce the

likelihood of *any* infectious disease. On the *Island Princess*, they have installed a wash area, consisting of three sinks and soap dispensers at the entrance to each dining area. The most popular spot for meals is the Horizon Court on the Lido Deck at the bow of the ship. Meals are served here in cafeteria style. To ensure all guests wash their hands, one of the staff is posted at the entrance and encourages everyone to carefully wash and dry their hands before entering the restaurant. The water is warm and cozy and turns on automatically when the hands are placed beneath the spigot. Paper towels are available at each sink. The washing quickly became a ritual, and I saw no guests offer resistance. In addition, there were many Purell hand-cleaning dispensers all around the ship. I was very pleased to see these excellent hand-cleaning practices being carried out by the Princess Cruise Lines.

ARRIVAL AND THE FIRST DAYS ON BOARD

How the Princess staff is able to board some 2,200 passengers efficiently on this massive vessel is difficult to comprehend. One way to look at modern cruise ships is that they are large floating apartment buildings or hotels, designed to plow through the seas in amazing luxury and with tremendous efficiency. As we proceed through our discussion of this amazing ship, we will cover the many accommodations, venues and types of entertainment available on board.

The Port Everglades Terminal in Ft. Lauderdale was crowded with noisy buses, taxi cabs and vans, all with the objective of disgorging themselves of their passengers and cargo and transferring everything, and everyone on board before the scheduled departure time of 4:00 PM. Porters and assistants

busied themselves scampering about as the hopeful new arrivals paid their cab fares, counted their suitcases and gathered their belongings. As people attempted to stay together and struggled with their carry-on bags, they entered one of two boarding lines: one for those who earlier obtained their Medallions and those unfortunate souls who did not.

A brief explanation is appropriate here. Princess ships dispense an electronic Medallion to all passengers, which acts as a room key, credit card on board, and a means of identification. It is about the diameter of a 50-cent piece and twice as thick. It comes issued with a lanyard to hang it around one's neck. Or one can purchase a watch band to hold it on the wrist. These Medallions can be ordered in advance or picked up at the terminal at the time of embarkation. Ordering in advance is the way to go. My wife and I did not and, it would appear, neither did a majority of the passengers. The line was long, but it moved steadily into the terminal where a large counter with about 20 associates confirmed names, IDs and passports. The Medallions were swiftly issued, and boarding proceeded. I was pleased that within 45 minutes of exiting our bus we were strolling on board. We immediately participated in the advantages of the Medallion which include automatic unlocking of your cabin as you walk within six feet of the room, immediate identification wherever you go on board, quick and reliable disembarkation and embarkation, and the ability to make purchases without carrying cash or credit cards. It enables bartenders to greet you by name before you order your favorite cocktail. A screen displays guests' photos and room numbers. The screen may include comments about guest preferences such, "Guest prefers Miller Light," or "Guest has "x" number of on-board credits remaining." In addition, the

Medallion is helpful for your steward, who may wait for you to vacate your room before cleaning. The ship-wide Medallion identification system also allows guests to locate spouses or friends or children on the ship by using the Princess Medallion app on their smartphones. This is very useful. I woke up from a nap one afternoon and Maureen was not in the room. I checked the app on my phone and quickly found her in the library.

There are multiple grades of Medallions that are differentiated by their color. The basic Medallion for first-time Princess cruisers is blue and gives only the basic benefits outlined above. After completion of one cruise, the next grade is gold, which entitles one to a magazine and some benefits for the next cruise. After three cruises or thirty cruise days, guests are advanced to Ruby. This adds some insurance benefits and more on-board savings. The next grade is Platinum, which is earned after five cruises or fifty days. This allows additional on-board discounts and entry to a private lounge. The highest grade is Elite, which requires fifteen cruises or 150 cruise days. This grade offers a popular benefit; complimentary laundry, along with additional discounts and priority disembarkation.

I have sailed on a number of cruise ships, and I have never encountered a system as useful as the Medallion system. It tremendously simplifies activities on board. It is just a matter of time before all cruise lines replicate it.

There is one other item I must mention about the *Island Princess* under the category of modern technology. A ship as large as this vessel can offer challenges to finding one's way around. So, to help guests, there are computerized screens on every floor adjacent to the elevators. They are touch screens with diagrams of each deck and notes about each amenity available on the sixteen decks. So, if you want to know which

direction you go to get to the Wheelhouse Bar on level 7, you touch the level 7 marker on the screen and the entire level appears with a guide on the left side of the screen that lists the amenities on that level. I have not seen a system like this on any other cruise line. After a few days, I had a grasp of all the destinations I required on board.

Princess offers, as a very useful and important cruising option, the use of their extremely good Wi-Fi service. It is not inexpensive, but passengers can choose the service for one device (or more). Maureen and I chose one device for each of us. Princess Lines claim they have the best Wi-Fi service on the seas. As noted, I think they do. On other cruise lines we seemed to have frequent loss of connections as we went out to sea. On *Island Princess* we had no loss of service anywhere around the world, which greatly pleased us. In today's world, this is an extremely important service. Kudos to Princess Cruise Lines.

As we boarded the ship, we were directed to a large, open four-story lobby, known as the Atrium. The Atrium is beautifully decorated and has many open spaces for informal gatherings, including a small central area for a band and a dance floor. And of, course there was the ubiquitous bar off to one side, which was busy serving exotic beverages to the talkative passengers. We were in our room within an hour.

As noted, the room we chose is known as a "mini suite." It had a comfortable queen bed (two singles connected) and a small adjacent living area with a desk, a sofa, an extra chair and a wall-mounted TV. Next was a sliding door that led to an outdoor $8' \times 10'$ verandah with two chairs and a small table. There was a second wall-mounted TV at the foot of the bed. The bathroom was fine with a tub-shower combo. There was

a small adjacent "walk-in" closet for hanging clothes and extra storage space.

Of interest in the realm of expediency is the amazing fact that the *Island Princess* had just arrived in port at 8 AM that morning and had somehow discharged the previous 2,200 inhabitants of the ship before we began boarding at 11 AM.

As the bright sun arced across the crystal blue Florida skies, final staff preparations were made for the massive ship to cast off. Deck hands scampered, doors were shut, stairs were pulled in, and lines were successively released as the sun descended toward the western horizon at 4:15 PM. The *Island Princess* glided away from the pier utilizing her bow and stern thrusters and the pilot engaged the powerful electric engines to thrust her to port and out through the narrow channel into the vast Atlantic. High rise apartments lined the shores, and denizens waved to us as they walked their dogs or jogged along the shore. In her brief time in port, the *Island Princess* had completed her innumerable goals of exchanging all the passengers, re-fueling and re-commissioning with food, drinks and tons of miscellaneous supplies. Quite a feat.

Our first encounters with the crew were propitious. All greeted us with "Welcome aboard," "good evening," "happy to have you on board," etc. Smiles and friendliness abounded.

The usual public announcements followed: watch the safety video in your room, find your life vests in your closet, visit your muster station. I was pleased, if not mildly astonished, that all our bags arrived intact in our room before dinner was served. Maureen and I took a quick walk-around the ship that included locating our muster station (as a U.S. Coast Guard commercial captain, I am particularly interested in safety protocols), finding the many and varying eating establishments, and locating

the areas of entertainment and lectures. The ship was better than very nice. It was quite luxurious and sophisticated. It was clean throughout and polished with lots of attractive woodwork and shining brass. Several of the restaurants and bars had handsome dark wood paneling. The design was well-thought out – with only one exception: some of the decks, unpredictably did not carry through the full length of the ship. A few were interrupted, requiring a trip up or down one or more decks to continue one's journey forward or aft. In addition, some elevators did not have stops on every floor. With time, this minor inconvenience was easily managed once the deck arrangements were recognized.

As we started out to sea that afternoon, I was pleased at how quiet the ship was with no detectable vibration, rattling, or engine noise. Today's cruise ships utilize electric energy to turn the great propellers. Massive diesel generators supply the electric energy for everything on the ship from powering the huge electric engines, to cooking, to refrigeration, to lighting throughout. The two gigantic props that extend from the stern create powerful thrust to push the ship forward (or backward). Along with the 2 main engines there are multiple bow and stern thrusters, which allow the ship to be guided left or right while docking. Later in the cruise, the ship made a 180-degree turn while in a static position using the bow and stern thrusters.

One of the most interesting components of any cruise is the opportunity to meet new people. The variety of folks on board cruise ships offers a true cross-section of Americana. For this reason, Maureen and I made an effort to attend dinner under the category of "open seating," or "sharing." It makes dinner a random enterprise, and we could be seated with up to six

other interesting passengers. The tricky part is remembering everyone's name. Practice helps. We always learn so much by interacting with different guests on board. Also, at breakfast and lunch we attempt to sit with "new" folks. It greatly adds to the enjoyment of the journey. As an example, one night at dinner, we sat with a couple from Maryland that lived about ten miles from our home. We spent a while catching up on common experiences and some mutual people we knew. That kind of meeting, however, is unusual. More likely, you will meet people from many parts of the world and from many fascinating walks of life.



When you first board the ship, take a casual stroll around, learn about the deck arrangements, the eateries and amenities. Don't worry about your bags: they will show up.