

## Beyond An Incredible Adventure

Hello everyone. Steve Kerper here, lucky husband of Debra Kerper. This is my first blog and, hopefully, not my last. Depends on what Y'ALL Think. On September 7<sup>th</sup> we left for Barcelona, Spain and our group of 41 adventurous souls met September 8<sup>th</sup>.

We started with a mixture of friends from previous cruises and people we met for the first Time. Ten days later we said goodbye as family.

Included in our group were Power chair uses, manual chair uses, Amputees & people with an assortment of disabilities, many coming to Europe for the first time, and a lot of apprehension to go around. However, the wonderful attitudes of the "Band of the 41" overcame any minor adversities some of us encountered. I found it very difficult to say good bye to these "family members" and would rejoin them at any time for any trip. We laughed the entire 10 days except when we parted, and I hid my tears from the others.

What we did as a "family group" is more important and incredible than what we saw but this is supposed to be a "travel blog" and I got a free pizza dinner tonight from Debra for writing this so I'll continue.

We started off by spending 3 days in Barcelona for our pre-cruise. We had large buses, some people transferring to seats and some remaining in chairs. We toured the city, went to a famous monastery in Monserrat (up in the mountains, very beautiful), however, the gelato was a little pricey but very good. I ate mine and Debra's, saw numerous Churches, many 100's of years old. Back in Barcelona was very impressed by the wonderful architecture of the infamous Gaudi, a person whose talent and visions were far ahead of his time. Still finishing his church. They are a little behind schedule.

Cruise day!!! We now board the Harmony of the Seas, the world's largest cruise ship, with 17 decks and a capacity of 7,012 guests (including us). Royal Caribbean made it 1 foot longer than its sister ship, the Allure of the Seas.

Among some of the features are: Fully accessible Merry go Round (makes me dizzy), however great New York hot dog stand by the merry go round. Robotic Bartender (2). I don't drink but it was great to watch. Broadway production of Grease, fine dining, both in the private restaurants (which I never went to this time) and in the dining room where I ate 5 shrimp cocktails per night, lots of filet mignon and, on formal night, 8 lobster tails. (Would have had

more but couldn't get a note from Debra). If all we did was ride around on the ship it would have been a marvelous trip.

Back to the scenery. 1<sup>st</sup> land stop Palma de Majorca, Spain. Very scenic, city tour, more old churches (that are not only interesting but sell good post cards), and an 800 year old olive tree. Somehow eating an 800 year old olive is not high on my list.

Next day, we cruise right along to Marseilles, France. More interesting old churches, lovely scenery, quaint villages, excellent French food (ate French fries, French bread, French toast, some drank French wine, others wine in French). Learned about Van Gough, (famous painter who cut off his ear but still heard all he wanted to hear) and later that night at dinner heard about his brother, Escargough. His brother was a bit slow, but still became well known.

Next stop ROME!!!! Went to see the coliseum, but by the time we got there it was RUINED. Still, wheel chair accessible, and we went in it, thru it, around it, learned about the gladiators, emperors, lions, tigers, and bears, saw living history. Not in bad shape after 2000+ years. Could use a little Urban Renewal and some better gift shops.

Really exciting.... next we went over to the Pope's House. The Vatican is the world's smallest country, 44 Square Miles. The art and artifacts are incredible. The Sistine Chapel was beyond anything I had ever seen (even nicer and more amazing than the Venetian in Las Vegas which also has painted ceilings). Michael - Angelo had a gig there and got many a back ache lying flat and painting the ceilings. I had hoped we could take His Holiness out for a pizza but there were thousands of tourists there and business is business.

I want to add at both the Coliseum and the Vatican we did not wait in line with the tourists. We were welcomed guests and went right in. Actually, in all the places in Europe we avoided the tourist lines and were treated with great respect and kindness.

Last stop was Naples. We saw the ancient ruins of Pompeii, including people preserved that were killed in the famous volcano eruption. Drove around the Amalfi Coast, enjoyed the absolutely beautiful scenery, and stopped at a factory where many of their items were lemons. Not bad lemons; lemon drinks, both alcoholic and non alcoholic, lemon soap, lemon of all kinds of things, very appealing. Handmade woman's shoes custom made while you watched. Next time I will skip the really small mini cookie (only thing I bought), charged me 1 euro. It's time to conclude before I get "blogged down."

What did all this amount to? Yes, it was a cruise. Yes, it was a Europe tour. Yes, it showed people that, despite your personal situation, the world is waiting for you and you can travel. You certainly can enjoy a well-planned and fully accessible wonderful trip (we prove that about 4 times a year with groups and the rest of the year with individuals).

But what was this really? It was a lifetime of new memories, full of joy and wonder. We laughed at ourselves, we laughed at others, we shared thoughts, many not spoken of before, and we came back enriched by what we gave each other.

Those of us who went were blessed, those of us who have yet to go, your blessing awaits you. Change your life, one trip at a time.

I Love Being With You,  
Steve