



Having originally booked the Thomson Dream's Caribbean Crossing cruise Leaving Jamaica on 22<sup>nd</sup> March, we found ourselves doubting our enjoyment on board due to the many bad reports about her over Christmas and New Year. Up until that point we had faith in the fact she was going into Hamburg for work to be done on her and that all would be well afterwards. After reports of the fire and the failed air conditioning we switched cruises to the Caribbean Gems and Coral Islands back to back cruises on the Thomson Destiny.

Prices were comparable – slightly less in fact so we upgraded our plane seats to Premium which made up the difference in our favour.



So the five of us – my wife and I, Gill and Martin and Keith, set off for Gatwick and we boarded a Thomson Airways Boeing 767-300ER (**E**xtended **R**ange) in First Choice livery around 8:45 am on Sunday March 20<sup>th</sup> after spending a pleasant night at Crawley's Arora hotel the night before.

The plane took off bang on time and we were very pleased by the comfort of the seats and the standard of service which I thought was impressive and good value.

This was our very first transatlantic flight and our very first cruise too.

We landed 9 hours later at La Romana airport in the Dominican Republic where a fleet of small coaches took us straight to the port to embark on the Destiny. We did not have to go through customs or collect baggage so this was very quick and La Romana port was only a few miles away.



Not the prettiest of places as chimneys belching thick black smoke were only half a mile away.



We were close to the front of the queue and embarkation took less than 20 minutes and we boarded the ship and were shown to our cabin 2016 on deck 2. This was an outside cabin with a porthole right at the front of the ship.

Our luggage arrived within 10 minutes and we met our cabin steward Ferdie who turned out to be extremely hard working, very polite and very accommodating.



After doing a few unpacking chores we made our way up on deck to watch and experience our first sailing off into the sunset. We then explored the ship a little and found the Clipper bar where we had drinks until our dinner sitting at 8:30pm.

After dinner we spent a little while in the Oklahoma lounge watching the resident band before heading off to bed, as we had been up a long time.

By this time we felt that there was a bit of a swell and the captain had told us that winds would get up to force 6. As a precaution we took Travel-ease sea sickness pills and then went to sleep.

In the night we woke and noticed that the rocking of the boat had got more pronounced but we felt fine. This was the only time we took pills for sea sickness and probably didn't need them anyway.

### **Day 1 Monday – At sea.**

Good breakfast in Seven Seas restaurant at 8am and we met some of our fellow passengers.

Explored the ship more and learned our way to get around. Ship felt very homely.

At 10:00am there was to be a mandatory Lifeboat drill and we had to find our way to our lifeboat stations wearing our lifejackets. The drill was carried out efficiently and everyone was given easy to understand instructions in case of an emergency.

Weather still quite choppy but it was sunny and hot so we thought about sitting out on deck for the afternoon. Finding a seat was a bit of a problem as I had not anticipated quite so many people, but in the end Gillie and I found chairs on the lifeboat deck which gave us the shade we were looking for.

Weather at this point was calming down. From then on the winds were Force 4 on the Beaufort scale and the sea 'slight'.



We had drinks in the Sky Bar which is a novel observation area wrapped around and half way up the ship's funnel, then cocktails downed, off for the Captain's cocktail party.

Dress code was smart suits, collar and tie for the men and it gave our ladies a chance to wear their posh dresses and look lovely.

We had our photo taken with Captain Emmanuelle Psorakis our Greek Captain and took a free cocktail from the tray. Captain Psorakis then took to the stage and introduced his senior staff. The Captain showed his sense of humour by doing the Greek Syrtaki dance as he came on stage and then he welcomed us and introduced his senior crew

After the cocktail party we then went downstairs to the Seven Seas restaurant for dinner. We met and made new friends on our oval table and were treated to a 5 course meal served by very attentive and observant waiters.

Typical bill of fare...

**Appetiser**

Crab Cake with chill dip or Chicken Liver Pate

**Tureen**

Beef Consommé or Cream of Vegetable Soup

**Salad Course**

Salad Nicoise

**Main course**

Tornedos of beef slices with a peppercorn sauce with Lyonnaise potatoes and vegetables

Or

Roast Chicken, roast potatoes and vegetables

Or

Vegetarian Mushroom Wellington

Or

Seafood Linguine

**Desert**

Tart Tartin

Or

Syllabub

Or

Ice Cream selection

Or

Sugar Free dessert selection

Or

Fresh Fruit Salad

Or

Cheese and Biscuits

The portions were not large, but after 5 courses (we only had 3 from then on!) it was really quite enough and you could probably have had the pasta course and the cheese after a pudding as well if you had wanted!

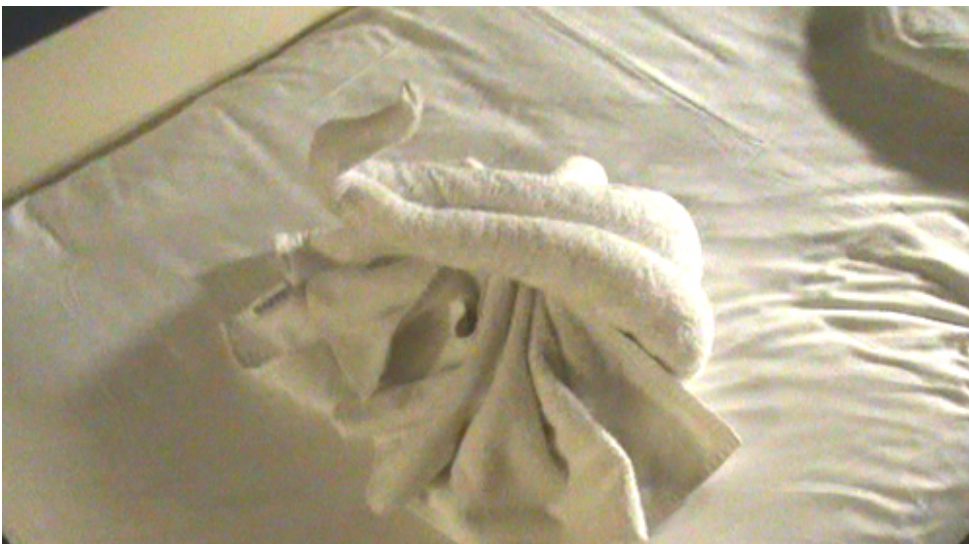
We thought the choice of food, the quality and the presentation deserved 9 out of 10. When fish was on the menu it always seemed to me to be overcooked a little but I'm not surprised considering 600 or 700 people per sitting and as I am a keen cook myself, maybe I'm nit picking!



Alan our wine waiter was very quick, very discrete and very professional. He kept our glasses of water constantly topped up on the table and delivered our wine for which he showed a genuine passion.

We were not on an all-inclusive drinks package and so we bought 1 bottle of wine for the 5 of us every night to have with our meal. Prices varied from about £16 to £24 per bottle. Once we had established a taste for the nice bottle of Crianza, Alan seemed to be ready with it every night although of course he still made a point of offering us the wine list in case we fancied a change.

After the first day we were happy and impressed.



When returning to our room the air conditioning (which worked faultlessly) had been turned down slightly and there was a swan made from 2 towels sitting on

one of the beds. The beds were turned down, each with a chocolate and the bathroom towels had been tidied (not that they needed tidying anyway!)

## **Day 2 Tuesday – Grenada**

I had unfortunately re-infected with the chest infection which I had previously acquired 2 weeks before we left and I spent a restless night coughing and spluttering.

My wife insisted I go to see the ships doctor when sick bay opened, but I first wanted to go on deck to watch us sail in to St Georges Grenada. So I went up on deck at 7:00am and was greeted by grey skies and a steady drizzle of rain!

Having persisted and watched our docking and also the docking of a larger more modern ship next to us, I made my way to sick bay. I only waited for 2 minutes before the doctor called me in. I told her of my ailment and she spent the next 10 minutes examining me and listening to my chest. Dr Lililya who seemed to be Russian or Ukrainian (?) took her time talking to me while another nurse took my temperature, blood pressure and my 'sats'.

She then prescribed a form of inhalant which she administered with a nebuliser and mask which instantly started to give me relief. I pondered why my own doctor had not prescribed something similar. She also gave me a bottle of linctus and anti-histamine to take. I felt that I was in very good and very caring hands and she told me to come back and see her tomorrow and the next day.

I was a little concerned as I knew there would be a charge for this consultation and treatment, but after the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of similar treatment I was well on the road to feeling better and the charge was £118. She had saved my holiday!

Grenada was a big disappointment to the 5 of us. In fact I think it was the low point of the whole holiday. It was not just the weather.

We had found a minibus taxi driver to take us round the island for \$20 each. He seemed to take us to all the tourist traps where we were pestered for money by the locals for simple things like having their picture taken. It made me realise the level of poverty and desperation in Grenada. One chap got quite aggressive and I had to be very firm with him, and other lads wanted \$2 to jump off a ledge 60 feet up into a lake by a waterfall. I wanted no part in these boys risking their lives just for me to watch and I refused, but even so they made me feel very guilty.

Lunch was a big disappointment on Grenada too as we had to wait nearly 90 minutes for a burger and salad in a dingy café place that seemed to be the best along the harbour front.

Once back on the ship and after dinner we went to the show in the Can Can lounge and watched the Entertainment Showteam's production. Well I must say it was extremely good. Great voices, great dancing, great costumes, great continuity and very very professional with equally as professional technicians on lights and sound. Martin, Keith and I have played in our covers pop band for the last 30 years and so I suppose you might say that we had a keen eye for the quality of the entertainment.

### **Day 3 Wednesday – St Lucia**

Up at 7:00am to watch the docking in Castries, St Lucia on a cloudless warm sunny morning (at last!) It was fascinating to watch the crew attend to the various ropes and ties on the front of the ship and we could also watch the Captain and his officers on the side of the bridge who were directing the docking.

Then after a while the mighty and vast Royal Caribbean's 'Adventure of the Seas' docked behind us followed by 2 other large cruise ships, so there were a total of 4 beautiful ships including ourselves docked this morning. I believe the Adventure of the Seas is one of the worlds largest cruise liners.



I loved St Lucia from the start and we disembarked showing our Destiny ID/charge cards which were scanned to count us as 'ashore' and made our way around the Cruise terminals duty free shops.

There were plenty of taxi drivers on hand but none of the aggression we had experienced in Grenada.

One guy approached us and offered a trip, not by minibus but by speed boat on a tour of the island. The price was high at \$60 each but it sounded pretty good and far better to be in the sunshine than cooped up in a mini bus. The tour included



drinks and entrance fees and minibus fare (for travelling up to the dive-by volcano park)



So off we went. Firstly by very powerful speedboat where an attentive guide told us all about the island while we sipped a rum punch and watched the coastline go by. We then moored up near Les Pitons and a minibus took us a few miles up one of the Pitons to the nature park where a young girl gave an account of the sulphurous gases and boiling mud of the active volcano.

Then onto a waterfall site where one could bathe in the hot springs. We didn't but some of our party (there were about 15 of us on the boat) did and enjoyed the hot water then the ice cold water from the waterfall.

Back onto the boat and we were dropped off on a beach with white sands, green palms and turquoise seas. When I say dropped off, I mean that we were taken close to the shore in 7 feet of water and told we could either swim to shore, or if we paid the big guy a dollar he would carry us or we could pay a dollar and transfer to a small catamaran which had nets for decking and another big guy would push us ashore.

Our ladies decided to go for the latter and after much mirth and tumbling finally rested their bottoms on the netting inches above the water. All went well until we reached the shore where us chaps alighted pretty smartly before the next oncoming wave caught us, the girls (slightly slower) were not so lucky and were swamped – more mirth and laughter! Great fun.

We were told we had about 40 minutes on the beach so we made for the beach bar and toilets and ordered a light salad for lunch.

The food once again took a long time to come and just as it was delivered the boat sounded its horn wanting us back on board.

We packed our salads up in boxes provided quickly by our host and made our way back for a return trip to the boat on the push-me-pull-you catamaran. More difficult this time as we were clutching our food with one hand while trying to steady ourselves with the other.

Arrived back at the port in good time and it was a great day out with money well spent.

We ate at our usual table in the Seven Seas Restaurant with our new friends and then went to the evening show to watch comedian Peter Piper.

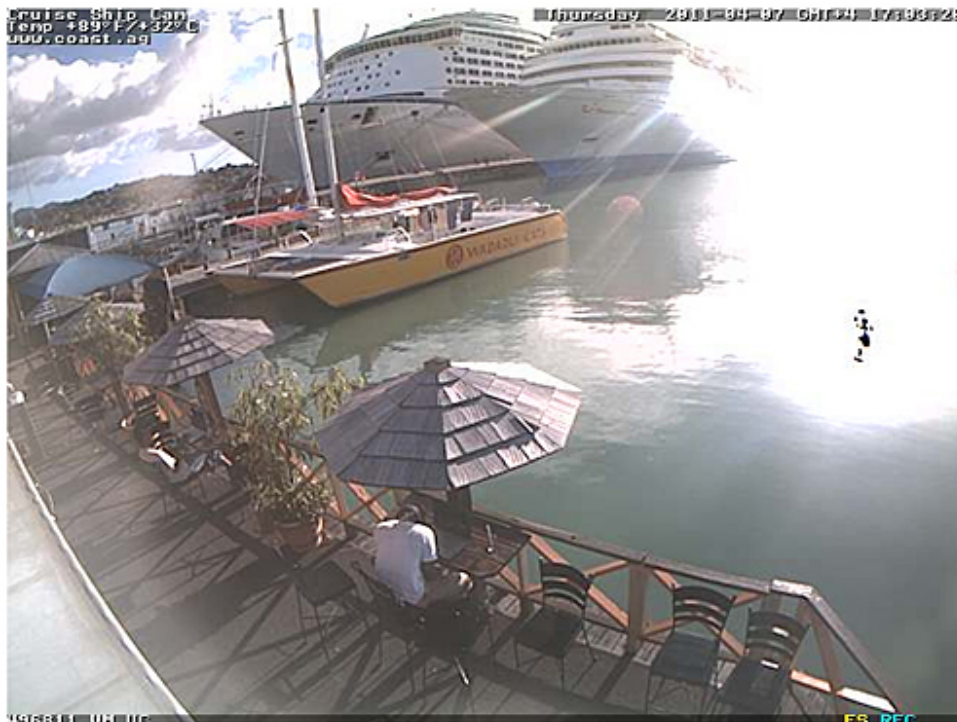
Although there were plenty of innuendos, his act was not smutty and I found myself gasping for breath because I was laughing so much. The guy was a great comedian and received a standing ovation.

After the show we tried out Blake's bar where a girl and guy on the piano ('Top Harmony') were singing easy listening songs. They were good, but we were a little disappointed by the fact that much of their music was on backing track on a laptop. To us guys who are accomplished musicians we felt that they were cheating just a little!

Also we noticed that the suave surroundings and atmosphere of Blake's was spoiled by the smell of diesel fumes, not overly so, but it was noticeable.

## **Day 4 Thursday – Antigua**

Woke to another bright sunny day as we sailed into St Johns Antigua. I immediately saw the bar which had the webcam overlooking the port which I had been looking though for the previous months and made a note to have a cold beer there on the way back to the ship.



*Webcam View of the Destiny and Adventure of the Seas taken a fortnight after we were there*

The Adventure of the Seas had followed us out of St Lucia the previous evening and docked alongside us in St Johns



*Actual photograph of the ships taken from Coasts harbour-side bar*

Today was to be our first beach day and we found a minibus taxi driver who recommended Turner's Beach, a few miles up the coast. Our spec was that the

beach should have a bar/restaurant with toilets and also sunshades and sun beds.

The taxi driver also took along a group of young girls who had come off of the Adventure of the Seas and they had wanted to go to a good beach too. They were telling us all about their big ship. It sounded fabulous but I wondered whether it had the atmosphere and camaraderie of the Destiny. I suspected not!

For \$15 each round trip the driver dropped us off at the superb Turner's Beach. The sands were white and the sea even more turquoise than the beach in St Lucia. There was shade under the palm trees on the beach for those who required it and rolling surf and hot sun.

We stayed most of the day and had a light meal and a couple of beers in the bar. Service was not quick but we resigned ourselves to the fact that the Caribbean way of life was so laid back it was probably horizontal!

Back to the ship in plenty of time to look round the shops at the port and pick up a Caribbean shirt for the evening's Caribbean deck party.



As we left I took a picture of the Adventurer of the Seas heading off into the sunset. We were to see her yet again before the holiday was out.

We became quite accustomed to taking a pre-dinner cocktail in the Clipper Bar listening to the Trio Rhythm of Three. Again they were using backing tracks (no drummer) but I suppose most people wanting to soak up the atmosphere wouldn't even have noticed. Cocktails were about £3.85 each and there was a big choice with a special cocktail of the day always available.

After a superb dinner we went to watch the entertainment showteam put on their musical production of Voodoo which was a James Bond spoof. Again the team showed off their considerable talents and it was a great night's entertainment.



Then off to the top deck for the outside Caribbean party which was lively and noisy. We didn't stay long as the early mornings; late nights and jet lag had caught up with us so we turned in well before the party finished.

Each night when you got back to the cabin, there would be the ships newsletter waiting for you alongside your towel animal which tonight was a monkey hanging from a coat hanger in the middle of the ceiling. It was wearing my sunglasses!



We had now got used to a very gentle rocking of the ship as it made its way through the night to the next port of call. Being right at the front of the ship, we would occasionally hear a bang and whoosh as waves slapped against the bow. The wind stayed at Force 4 and the state of the sea was 'slight' for the rest of the holiday.

## Day 5 Friday – St Maarten

I loved St Maarten the moment it came into view. I was again on deck by 7am and watched the docking. We used to be woken each morning by the rope winches readying the ropes for docking. I dare say this may have disturbed some people – like the couple next door who badly wanted to change their room, but it was a comforting alarm-call each morning to us, telling us that the new day and new adventure on a new island was about to begin.

It was far too easy to overindulge with the breakfasts! There were Croissants, rolls, pastries and muffins; there was fresh Caribbean fruit of different varieties, A good choice of cereals and porridge, cold cuts of meat and slices of cheese, then hard boiled eggs, scrambled eggs, fried eggs, bacon, sausages, black pudding, hash browns, baked beans, mushrooms and if that did not suit, then you could have pancakes with maple syrup!

Tea coffee and fruit juices were on tap but due to my cough I had found slices of lemon available (provided for those lemon tea drinkers) and sachets of honey. So my morning and bedtime drink was always hot honey and lemon which helped my cough.



St Maarten and the port of Philipsburg was a blaze of colour and delight for the eyes. With the blue skies and turquoise waters, there were colourful beach umbrellas and coloured boats.

We took a short walk into town and the girls wanted to look round the numerous jewellers' shops. Gillie my wife bought a lovely multi coloured blue bracelet and Gill found the earrings she wanted to celebrate her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. We were treated very kindly by the proprietors who produced free cold drinks for us (once we had actually bought some of their merchandise!)

We took a \$2 each way bus ride up to Marigot on the French half of the island which was quite an experience. The coaches are all very small seating 3 across or 4 across if the extra gangway seat is pulled down and used. People just chucked their fare into a cardboard box near the driver who stopped conveniently when anybody yelled.

We had a crepe in a French bistro, actually a Crepe Suzette but were puzzled by the apparent absence of the essential Grande Marnier liquor which the crepe is usually soaked in. But according to the waiter, the liquor had actually been poured over. Hmmm! Oh well never mind!

We had intended to go to Mayo beach to watch the aircraft fly in 50 feet over the beach and the idiots getting too close to the jet thrusts get blown into the sea as the jets took off. Unfortunately the wind was blowing in the opposite direction and the jets took off from the sea end of the runway, so no point in making an extra journey. We settled for a walk round the marina at Marigot and picked out the boat which we would own if we had the money!

After dinner and a show which was not too much to our liking (The Barricades who were a cheesy and stupid comedy song and dance act) we headed to our now usual pre-retirement table in the Lido café at the back of the ship for a hot drink. We would see our waiters from dinner who were still working even at 1:30am!



Food was still being served and there was always a late night curry on for those who were still hungry (along with burgers, hot dogs and chips) One night I did have a spoonful of chicken curry to see what it was like and was pleasantly surprised by its kick! A good curry, sadly though no appetite! Too much food consumed already!!!



I suppose you could say that although we ate more than we would normally, we were quite reserved and disciplined compared to a few others who would be seen with great late-night plates of Sausage beans and chips! But hey... they were on their holiday!!!

The moon was shining over the sea and occasionally we would spot land or even another cruise ship far off in the dark. The eyes played a funny trick though because as the boat rocked gently and you looked out to sea and the lights of land or a ship, it would appear that the lights were moving up and down, but of course it was you moving!

## **Day 6 Saturday – Tortola – British Virgin Islands**

It was true to say that the 5 of us were not too bothered about visiting Tortola. It was a small island and the prospects were that there was not much there.

When I appeared on deck at 7 am to watch the docking, I suddenly realised that this place might be very special indeed. Although there was 50% cloud cover that morning, there were dozens of islands all around and this to me was the definitive view I held in my mind of the Caribbean.



We were only to visit for a part day and the ship would be leaving at 2.00pm At which time a sail-away deck party would begin. Normally you were in port until 6pm and all passengers had to be on board by 5:30pm ready to leave.

Every time you left ship, your card was scanned and you were considered 'ashore' on the database, when you returned your card was scanned again to let the ships company know you were back on board. They counted you all out and counted you all back again. This method was very quick and efficient.

Also you were always expected to sanitise your hands when reboarding the ship by using the anti-bacterial gell provided at the bottom of the gangway.

We found the islanders very friendly and helpful. We said we were looking for a tour but needed to be back promptly by 1pm



We were guided to 'Wolf' who was a very very good taxi driver and guide. For \$15 each (and he would take no money from us until we finished his tour and got back to the ship) he took us to several places around the island. His taxi was in fact a flat bed lorry which had been decked out with seats under a roof and painted in bright colours.

First stop was a bar with a panorama over Road Town looking down on our ship and over the other numerous islands. The bar served a superb mango smoothie which we enjoyed.



Wolf took us to the very top of the island, another bar, and we could climb onto the roof and look 360 degrees. We were under no pressure to buy anything at the bar at all and the bar tender was very friendly.

After visiting a 400 year old rum factory where for \$1 you could try out 3 different rums, he allowed us some time on Cane Garden Beach which turned out to be **the** beach of the whole cruise!

Wooden bars served rum punch and for \$15 you could buy a half gallon to take onto the beach with you and drink at your leisure while standing in the azure seas.

We decided that when we visited Tortola again next Saturday as was on our itinerary, we would return here for a beach day – well half a day as we still had to be back at the boat by 1:30pm



The sail-away party was very good with the entertainment team performing out on deck on their deck-stage. As I said great voices and great dancers and while all this was going on the pool grill served up a mouth-watering barbeque of steaks, chicken, sausages and burgers and some lovely salads as well.

The scenery was stunning as we watched island after island go by in the sunshine.



We had all been surprised by Tortola and this became our favourite. No wonder Richard Branson has bought one of the Virgin Islands for himself – Necker –

actually he's just bought Mosquito Island as well!!! Talk about how the other half live!



At dinner in the evening there was the Parade of the Baked Alaska where waiters and chefs turned down the lights and brought out flaming trays of ice-cream filled meringues while some banged pots and others shone coloured lights.

The waiters were always eager to entertain. They sang songs while others walked around with napkin earplugs taking the micky, they did partial strip tease and got up to all sorts of mischief which all the diners thoroughly adored.

During the first week our waiters were Lito and James. Both were extremely courteous and efficient and pandered to our every need. Very professional and again a credit to the ship.

During our second week we were told that James and Lito would be moving on to wait on another table and we asked if we could go with them. Unfortunately this was not to be and so we had a new waiter Amit who was definitely younger and less experienced. By the high standards set by our two original waiters it was noticeable that little mistakes were made, but really who could have cared he was such a great guy!

Amit was just as eager to please and would entertain us with magic tricks at the end of the meal. During the coming week he would curiously put 2 huge plates of chips on the table with our main course. No one had asked him for them, but he thought we all like chips so had ordered them especially for us from the kitchens!

If ever these guys read this, I would like to say a **big thank you** to them.

We had expected to see the Thomson Dream at Tortola according to the itinerary we had been given last year before we changed ships. There was no sign of her so the itinerary must have changed.

But then she was reported to be due at Tortola the next day by the ship's newsletter and we did see some lights of a ship sneaking past in the opposite direction to us as we made our way back to La Romana.

## **Day 7 Sunday – Dominican Republic**

I was on deck by 7am again with Keith and our cameras, but we were far off from La Romana and did not dock until 8:30am

We could see the black smoke coming out the chemical plant at La Romana form miles away and I hoped that wind would be blowing the smoke away from the boat and not over it. Luckily the smoke was being blown in the other direction.



After breakfast we went ashore and found the bus to take us to Altos de Chavon. In the news letter the night before was a tip off that \$7 return would take us to this delightful reconstructed ancient village high up over a winding river, here there were craft stalls, bars, museums and an ancient amphitheatre.

The Thomson Excursion to take you there and give you a Mississippi type boat ride down the river afterwards would cost \$35 each so we thought our \$7 choice was good value.

The coach took us down a road blazing with colourful bougainvillea and other flowering shrubs and set us down in the village. We spent until 12:30pm there (last bus back was 1pm) and had a good look round.



When we found the amphitheatre which was all decked out with lights and sound system ready for a concert, we gave our own impromptu concert down below on the centre stage with some acapella harmony. We musicians can never resist a performance! To our delight a large group of American tourists had assembled at the entrance to the theatre and listened to us giving us keen applause and loud woosps!

The rest of the day back on ship was considered as a deck-day by us and we did some sun bathing on a sun bed and had a few drinks.

It had been a busy week. We watched passengers who had finished their cruise leave the ship for the last time to fly home and we poignantly considered that we were now halfway through our holiday.

## **Day 8 Monday – At Sea**

I was a little bored. There was no port to watch while we docked this morning, there was no shore-leave, and there was nothing to see but the Caribbean Sea as we headed for St Vincent. Weather was fine sea slightly more choppy than it had been of late but we sort of knew that it would be as we figured there were calmer waters between the islands.



But it was a special day because it was Gill's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. Secret plans had been made and were in process, the first of which were balloons and a happy birthday signed pinned on Gill and Martin's cabin door when they got up.

We had lunch in the Lido (salads were the call of the day as the amount we were eating was obviously affecting to our weight and our girth!)



We listened to the resident band Addiction on deck at lunchtime. Again copious use of backing tracks even though there were 5 musicians in the band. But our drummer Keith thought that Crystal the drummer was actually doing a good job playing calypso and reggae fills over the drum machine's standard beat.



The captain's cocktail party for the second week's cruise was on but we didn't feel the need to go again.



During the evening Martin and Gill bought champagne for us and we toasted Gill's membership to the sexagenarian's club.

At dinner which on Sundays is an open dining arrangement with no specific table Abdulah the head waiter had put aside a special table so that we could celebrate Gill's birthday together.





Instead of pudding, Martin had arranged a frosted chocolate fudge cake with candles and a collection of waiters moved into position around us complete with guitars to sing Happy Birthday and a few other songs to Gill. Great time, much embarrassment to Gill who was hoping to keep her birthday low key but full marks to the waiters for all of the attention!

We finished off the night in Blakes bar where the Assistant Cruise Director John Riley was going to do a solo spot. John was also one of the Entertainment showteam – a little older and more portly than the rest of the team but we had seen and assessed his talent, okay - so we thought that in the suave setting of Blakes bar we would see the more sophisticated side of him as he sang maybe some Sinatra or Bubl  or Bennet while we sipped our cocktails.

Wrong!!!

We got a cheesy Blackpool type performance where he delivered childish pantomime-like comedy and novelty songs. We were embarrassed to watch and I actually wrote a note to Gavin the cruise director a few days later saying that we felt that a great opportunity had been missed to see the other side of the performer allowing him to take on a bit of street-cred. I probably should have kept my comments to myself in retrospect, but musicians we are and we usually say what we think when we don't believe an act is particularly cool. Never mind!

## Day 9 Tuesday – St Vincent

We hoped that St Vincent would not be like Grenada as Grenada was the nearest to St Vincent. On deck Keith and I watched as we pulled into Kingstown At 8am and surveyed the sights. It did look a little like Grenada in many ways as it was chaotic and higgledy piggledy.



The Cruise news had mentioned about the Botanical Gardens close to the town, so we decided to walk to them to try and walk off some of the food we'd eaten over the last week or so.

It turned out to be about 3 miles and mostly uphill so this gave us a bit of exercise. The weather was bright with a bit of cloud and we walked thru bustling Kingstown.

When we got to the Garden we were met by a guide who was actually a Professor of Botany so we had the perfect person to take us around. He was so passionate about his plants and was extremely entertaining. He asked for no money yet and said we could pay the entrance fee on exit.

We found the tour round the gardens very interesting and talking to the man was like talking to an old friend. He was very genuine. We approached a birdcage containing a solitary and lonely looking parrot and as we approached there was a young guy with a guitar who asked us if we would like some music. As quick as a flash Martin said "Well would YOU like some music?" so we did the party piece again and the lad joined in singing top harmony. Again a big crowd congregated around us and we received their applause. I am particularly fussy about who plays my guitars so I was honoured and surprised by the lad giving up his instrument to me at the drop of a hat. We gave him \$10 and he said that he'd

only just come to St Vincent and that today had been his best ever day because he'd enjoyed our sing song.

We left our guide after we had paid and tipped him and headed back to the town. We stopped off at a dodgy looking Demons Bar for a cold beer (Martin always goes for this sort of thing!) and then back into town where Martin wanted to go to a dodgy looking barber to have his head shaved! Rather him than me!

Gillie and I slept for an hour or two in the afternoon as the time differential had caught up with us again.



Then it was cocktails in the Sky bar and then dinner then an evening show. Motown this time which was absolutely fabulous!

## **Day 10 Wednesday – Barbados**

Oh! We're going to Barbados!!!! – as the song says - and we were not disappointed!!!

Interesting docking at 8 am with 4 cruise ships including ourselves. The port duty free shops were the biggest of the cruise and we spent a good hour looking round them before sorting out the arrangements for the day.

We had decided that the day was going to be another beach day and we found a minibus taxi that would take us to a beach with our spec for \$15 each.



The beach was magnificent with its turquoise waters, white sand and rolling surf. There was a bar restaurant behind us and sunbeds and umbrellas available for \$5 and \$3 respectively. The added surprise was that the money we paid for the sunbeds and 'brollies was redeemable for food and drink at the bar!!! Great deal!!! So a bucket of 7 beers was bought with one of the vouchers and we also ate there late afternoon.

The rolling surf was great fun and very cooling as it was a hot day.

Our driver took us back in plenty of time for the ship so we looked around the shops at the port again. It seems that all of the islands we visited have these duty free shops right on the port quay and this is where you go through to the towns and also go through security to get back on the ship.

We were over an hour late leaving Barbados as there were 3 announcements asking for a couple to make contact as the ships records showed they were missing. A great deal of concern grew amongst the passengers that something bad had happened to them.

As we went to bed we heard that their belongings had been off-loaded and that they would now be in the care of the port authorities. "There but for the grace of God go us" I thought to myself envisaging ourselves having an accident or worse.

We left Barbados in the dark and on a bit of downer thinking about those poor passengers.



In the evening after dinner we attended the Crew's Got Talent show in the Can Can lounge. It was fantastic! JD one of the waiter's was particularly hilarious and spontaneous and certainly got our vote. Another lad worth mentioning was Walter who sang 'Lady' which almost brought tears to your eyes as he sang it with such soul and feeling. John Riley was the MC and we did not like the way he would come on stage and start announcing before each crew act had finished. This is very bad manners in our book so he got another black mark from us!

### **Day 11 Thursday – Dominica**



Out of all the islands on our cruise, I felt Dominica was very different to the rest.

I heard or read somewhere that the island has not changed much since Christopher Columbus discovered it. It was lush and green with little apparent civilisation and also had a mysterious quietness and stillness about it.

When asking to find out more about the unfortunate passengers who went missing we were told that they had been on board all of the time!!!

We had docked at Portsmouth which is not the principal town of Dominica. The docking seemed difficult and I watched the Captain lose his temper as he was directing the docking and he bellowed "Security, you will give me the position NOW!!!!" at some poor unsuspecting crewmate who was working halfway down the ship near the embarkation hatch.

After breakfast we booked the Ship's bridge tour and had a good look round at the various equipment explained to us by the 2<sup>nd</sup> officer. He told us all about the engines and bow thrusters and also mentioned the ships stabilisers that reduce the ships rocking and rolling movements when at sea by 75%. I didn't realise the Destiny actually had stabilisers as she is a ship of the late seventies. I think it is a good job that she has.

After lunch we decided to take a walk into 'town' which was along a coastal leafy lane. The island is an ecology nature park and it is very obvious.

The walk to town in the sunshine was very pleasant and took about half an hour.

As we walked thru the shallow surf up the beach we noticed the rusted hulk of several ships either on the beach or actually in the town. They had been deposited there by the last fierce hurricane in 2004. Where ever we went in the Caribbean there always seemed to be some reminder of the vulnerability of the land by powerfully bad weather.

We stopped at a bar on the beach which was little more than a shack but still seemed to have a command over its neighbours nearby.



The scene was set perfectly when a tall sailing ship docked in the middle of the bay. It was almost a surreal visit to the past, and still the hush of the place persisted only disturbed by the rush of waves up the sand.

One person commented to me when back on board the Destiny that he didn't want to leave and would return immediately when his lottery numbers came up!

I am still haunted by this place even now!

Pre-dinner cocktails in the Sky bar were now the norm before dinner and then after dinner a show. Tonight was the Rock and Roll show and it was as good as ever. Performers of note were Jordan (skinny lad with his hair-quiff), Stephen who was a very fine singer (you should have heard his rendition of Queen's Don't Stop Me Now!) Philip and Phil and Jody. Paul one of the dancers was extremely energetic on stage but curiously sleepy when ever we saw him off duty around the ship!





Afterwards there was a late night Beach party on deck which we attended. In addition, the resident band were there to play their reggae and calypsos (and some Bob Marley of course) and also the Show team. The captain judged the worst Caribbean shirt competition which was very well supported by many folk who had invested in gory-coloured Caribbean shirts just for the event. Mine had pictures of parrots on it!

There was something just a little perverse about having all this noise and light in the middle of the Caribbean Sea while surrounded by the utter blackness of the sea at night and the night sky!



As always a hot late night drink in the Lido bar before bed.

## Day 12 Friday – St Kitts

This was to be our last full day of island hopping. Keith and I both saw the ship in to dock – it was 15 minutes late this morning - and after breakfast we all descended onto the town where Martin and Gill went off to buy Gill a special watch with the money she had for her birthday.

There were a group of musicians playing ukuleles and steel drums on the quayside and I gave them a dollar and filmed them while they played.



As we wandered round the town's park constructed to celebrate St Kitts independence we were approached by a chap who asked us for money towards sending 12 competitors to London's Olympic Games. We gave him all the cash we had on us but he refused to take a Bajan 50 cent piece!!! I really don't know if this guy was on the level – I have a feeling he probably wasn't despite the badge he was wearing and it was probably yet another scam to get money from cruise tourists.

We had planned to do our one and only official Thomson excursion in the afternoon. The idea was to take a ride on the St Kitts scenic railway. It was very expensive at £60 each.

The minibus picked us up and gave us a tour en-route to the station.

The train duly arrived and we gawped at the wreck we were about to travel on! Maximum speed was 8mph and just about pulled its 5 double deck carriages. We clambered aboard and spent the next 2 hours on a slow noisy screechy trip round the island. It was probably a good way of seeing everything and the children of the island would waive cheerily to us as we passed.



On board we had a commentary punctuated by 3 girls singing songs and by glasses of free rum punch served by girls who gave the impression they wanted badly to be elsewhere!

I suppose there was charm in the train ride but I don't think it was worth the money.

Another show in the evening after dinner - which we took in the Lido bar just for a change.

### **Day 13 Saturday – Tortola – British Virgin Islands**

We were very much looking forward to our return to Tortola! We had planned the previous Saturday to spend our short time at Cane Garden Bay Beach and we found a taxi lorry driver who would take us there and back for \$15 (Same price as the previous Saturday's tour!)

We were a little anxious to get to the beach as our time was short but the driver kept stopping to give a commentary as we went. There were about 30 people in the back of the lorry and he had to be told firmly but politely that we wanted to go to the beach - now!



Eventually we arrived after traversing Tortola's tortuous unfinished roads!

This was our perfect beach.

There were beach bars, sunbeds and palm trees and a guy selling fresh coconuts which he chopped open with a machete and laced with rum so you could drink with a straw. Very tropical!!!

The sky was blue and with other islands in the distance and the sea was the colour of a topaz. There were pelicans swooping in and landing within 4 feet of us and colourful fish around our feet – some giving us a little nip now and again. It was sheer bliss and I would go back there tomorrow. The BVI people are fiercely proud of their islands and culture but made us welcome in an up front way like none of the other islands.



Back on board at 1.30pm and the second sail-away party announced the end of the holiday - bar our remaining trip back to the Dominican Republic.

We said goodbye to our waiters at dinner and gave them a small gratuity although the cruise said all tips were included in the price we had paid. Everyone had done a first class job of looking after us and we appreciated it.

We saw the last show then went back to our cabins to pack our cases.

## **Day 14 Saturday – Dominican Republic**

Our cases were sealed with sticky labels as per instructions and picked up from outside our cabins after 3am. We would not be seeing these until we arrived back at Gatwick.

We got up on the Sunday morning and after breakfast went back to our room to vacate it by 10am. We paid £20 for a temporary room where we could lock our stuff and freshen up before we left for the airport. You could keep the room until 2.30 when it then had to be made up for the new passengers, but luckily we only needed it for a portion of that time

We sat on deck for the rest of the morning and then looked over the ship and watched our cases being loaded onto fleets of lorries.

At 1.30 we made our way with our hand luggage back to the bus park and boarded the coach for a 15 minute drive to the airport.

There was something very curious about La Romana airport and the coach driver lost his way to the terminal, having to back up from roads he should not have gone down. We joined a long queue to have our passports checked by what seemed like a 16 year old youth outside before we entered the terminal building and baggage scanning.

Once inside there was complete lack of information and you could not clearly hear any of the announcements when they were made over the PA.



But we managed to twig when our plane was boarding and got on to sit back and relax on our flight home and reflect on our fabulous 2 weeks in the Caribbean. We had good news too – although we had taken over 9 hours to reach La Romana from Gatwick on our outward journey, our home trip was going to take just 7.5 hours due to tail winds.

We enjoyed the flight home and watched the film *The Kings Speech*. The films on the plane were very up to date and we each had a 10 inch screen to watch in the back of the seat in front of us. There was also a music library that could be accessed and video games too. I enjoyed watching the in-flight maps and travel information showing our speed, height and estimated time of arrival.



The sunset from 5 miles high was dramatic – a blue sky with the orange of the earth on fire below and it happened really quickly as we travelling towards the sun and the darkness at the terminator.

Landing well ahead of schedule we were disappointed that our minibus driver had not been monitoring our arrival time and had not even started the journey from Newbury to pick us up. He was an hour and a half late! No tip for him!

We were finally dropped off, tired and looking forward to a rest. Martin then phoned to tell us that one of his suitcases had been opened and Gill's new watch had been stolen. It was our guess that someone who had scanned the cases that morning before our arrival at the airport had noticed the profile of the watch on the x-ray scanner's display and had helped himself. I'm sure that Gill will get most of her money back from the insurance but it put a sour ending on what was a first class holiday.

Would we do it again? Would we go on another cruise?

You bet we would and are talking about another in a few years time to celebrate my 60<sup>th</sup>.

Did Thomson do a good job? Well they get a very good mark from me and the rest of the gang, nearly 10 out of 10! They seemed to have had this cruise well organised and executed. Well done Thomson!

I look forward to hearing about the cruise on the Thomson Dream we nearly went on! I really hope those people enjoyed their cruise as much as we did and that they had none of the problems we were dreading.