

SPRING 2022

Sunset at Pattaya City, Thailand

travelworld

INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE

Spring into Travel



The Magazine Written & Photographed by North American Travel Journalists Association Members

Spring Back into Travel by *Taking a Cruise*



Looking down on
the St Thomas Harbor

Story and Photos by Sandy Bornstein

When COVID-19 caused the global cruise industry to become sidelined, I couldn't help but wonder when it would be safe to cruise again. As an avid cruiser, I am keenly aware of the efforts that cruise ships took prior to the pandemic to ensure the safety and well-being of their diverse clientele. For decades, cruise ships have monitored outbreaks of norovirus, respiratory diseases, Legionnaires' disease, vaccine-preventable diseases, as well as other contagious illnesses. On numerous occasions, I witnessed first-hand how ships instituted stricter onboard policies to prevent serious outbreaks of disease and

quarantined passengers after they became contagious.

However, a new era in cruise travel began when the Japanese government mandated that the Diamond Princess be quarantined off the Yokohama coast in 2020. While reading and watching the news stories generated by this troubling event, I realized that my comfort level would determine when I would sail again.

It was challenging to predict the trajectory of the pandemic as waves of the disease ebbed and flowed and countries responded in different ways. Our previously booked cruises needed to be postponed and rebooked several times. Reserving a

new cruise seemed very speculative, especially if the proposed itinerary involved international travel. But when you are simultaneously coping with a spouse who has glioblastoma, an incurable brain tumor, time becomes very precious. Maintaining a forward-looking mindset that includes copious travel plans becomes paramount to our lifestyle.

Throughout the pandemic, we found safe ways to explore domestic destinations. Initially, we planned road trips. By the spring of 2021, we were willing to travel by airplane to various U.S. cities. If we were to sail again, I had to overcome my pandemic cruise fears and choose well thought out destinations and embarkation dates.

Celebrity Cruises Apex

While we did not anticipate taking our first cruise until March 2022, we made a last-minute decision to take a Caribbean cruise in December of 2021. Disappointingly, our plans for a West Coast media trip did not materialize as we had anticipated. We were looking forward to traveling, but suddenly we did not have a destination. Since I didn't want to disappoint my husband, I started researching spur of the moment options. We unanimously agreed that booking a Celebrity Cruises Apex Retreat Class cabin coupled with a three-island itinerary to San Juan, St. Kitts, and St. Thomas was a good fit. Within just a couple of weeks of the sailing, we snagged one of the last suite class cabins on this brand-new ship.

The crowds in the airports, aboard airplanes, in the Fort Lauderdale hotel, and at Port Everglades, reaffirmed our belief that people were traveling despite the COVID mandates. I felt confident that the vaccination and pre-cruise COVID testing requirements would minimize our risks for exposure. While nothing in life is 100% guaranteed, we felt confident that we would be okay if we inadvertently contracted COVID aboard the ship.

Advantages of the Retreat

At the Fort Lauderdale Cruise Port, Retreat Class guests enter the terminal building through a special door and receive personalized service. Onboard, we immediately enjoyed the perks of this unique category by becoming acquainted with The Retreat Sundeck, the Retreat Lounge, and the Luminae Dining Room. Since these public spaces were restricted to suite class guests, we didn't encounter large crowds. Our only exposure to larger crowds while onboard occurred when we attended an evening performance or daytime program in the innovative Theatre. To avoid unnecessary close contact with other passengers, we rarely used an elevator and chose to exercise at non-peak times.

With a spacious cabin and relaxing veranda, the desire to spend time by ourselves remained a viable option. However, our comfort levels returned shortly after boarding the ship. While

Celebrity Apex Sky Suite Veranda- A Private Respite



Introducing Celebrity's Newest Ship-- The Apex

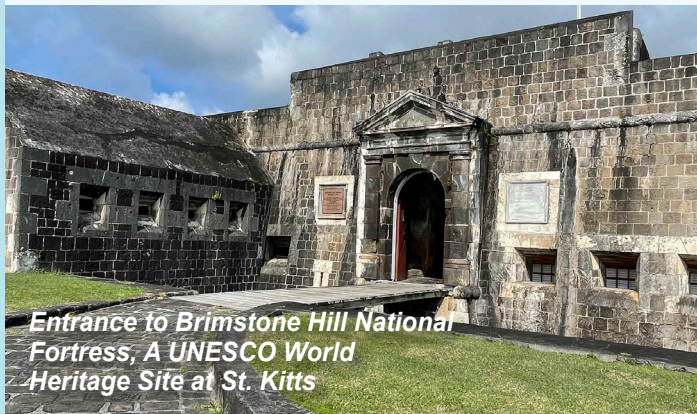
at sea, we happily divided our time in The Retreat areas. Having experienced the Luminae Restaurant during a Japanese intensive sailing in 2019 aboard the Celebrity Millennium, we knew that the culinary staff could accommodate Ira's nutrient-dense diet. However, with a noticeably larger dining area, the service was less personalized and a bit slower, but the overall quality of the made-to-order entrees remained intact.

Celebrating Chanukah

Our weeklong cruise coincided with the concluding days of the festival of Chanukah. During Jewish holidays, Celebrity Cruises accommodates its Jewish guests by offering group celebrations. An American cantor led a short service which included the blessings over electric candles. Dozens of attendees were treated to traditional Chanukah foods— latkes (potato pancakes) and sufganiyot (jelly donuts).



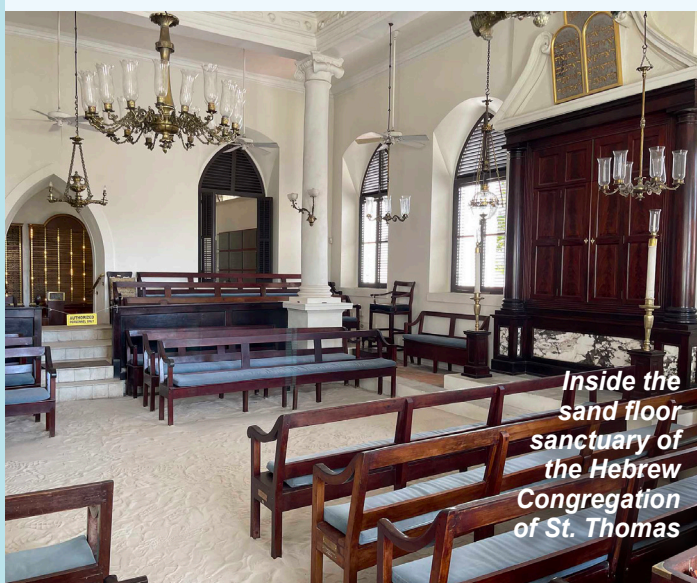
Greeted by a strategic fortress when Entering the Puerto Rico Harbor



Entrance to Brimstone Hill National Fortress, A UNESCO World Heritage Site at St. Kitts



Inside Castillo San Felipe del Morro with three flags flying



Inside the sand floor sanctuary of the Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas

SHORE EXCURSIONS

Prior to arriving in Fort Lauderdale, we made our shore excursion plans. Even though we had previously visited two out of the three ports of call, we planned to disembark at each island. However, we were reluctant to book a large group tour. Instead, we chose to either explore on our own or arrange a private tour. Surprisingly, we did not have to wait in any lines when we left and later returned to the ship. Most of the passengers remained onboard. When talking to some of these cruise guests, we learned that the fear of contracting COVID motivated their choice to avoid the ports.

San Juan

Our mid-afternoon arrival at San Juan's port caused abbreviated visits to San Felipe del Morro Castle and Castillo de San Cristobal. Instead of the anticipated closing time of 5 pm, these sites shut their doors promptly at 4:30 pm. Even though we had previously toured these historic sites, we wanted to acknowledge the 500-year anniversary of the founding of Old San Juan, the oldest city in the United States. While walking to and from these noteworthy landmarks, we observed how some streets were recovering slowly from the latest hurricane. As the sun was setting on the horizon, we returned to the ship for dinner.

St. Kitts

St. Kitts' historic attractions can only be accessed by a car or bus. My online research for a tour guide led to several dead ends. Eventually, a tour operator responded to my email. The pandemic, coupled with the curtailment of cruises for a prolonged period, caused many tour operators to seek other sources of revenue.

Chris James, a tour guide for St. Kitts/Nevis Luxury Taxis and Tours met us at Port Zante. Our half-day tour stopped at the Fairview Great House and Botanical Garden, which included time to tour the recently opened slavery exhibit, Romney Manor, Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park, and a photo opportunity at a panoramic overlook. We did not see any other tour groups. The large parking lots were almost totally empty. Only a handful of visitors in private cars were willing to visit.

After listening to Chris's introduction to St. Kitts' history and visiting these landmarks, we had a better understanding of the Europeans' intention to eliminate the native population and subsequently implement a profitable sugar plantation industry dependent on African slave labor. Had we chosen to remain on the ship, we would have missed this chapter of history.

St. Thomas

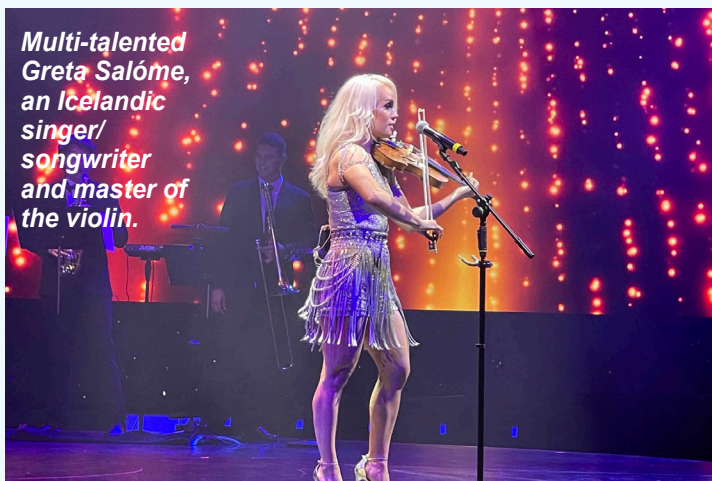
At the St. Thomas port, we were greeted by Nicole Petersen, a customer care coordinator for the United States Virgin Islands Department of Tourism. She arranged for us to visit an historic synagogue, experience a scenic overlook, and to participate in a food tour. During our visit to The Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas, Agnes Rampino (Agi) provided a comprehensive history of “the oldest synagogue building in continuous use under the American flag, the second oldest in the Western Hemisphere—and only one of five synagogues in the world with sand on the floor.”

In the afternoon, Jane DiCola, a tour guide for St. Thomas Food Tour, introduced us to some St. Thomas history and a cross section of local foods and Caribbean favorites. Our thirsts were quenched with an herbal tea and a signature alcoholic beverage called a painkiller. We also tasted salt fish cakes, coconut drop cookies, rum cake, and a Caribbean sampling inundated with nutrient-dense vegetables and spices. After sampling some local favorites, we hope to return so we can indulge in more Caribbean foods.

Becoming Receptive to Cruising Again

Our December 2021 Celebrity Apex sailing to the Caribbean reignited our desire to include cruising into our travel plans. After a long hiatus, we once again experienced the exceptional perks of a successful voyage. We had ample time to step away from our daily concerns by relaxing during sea days and seeking wonderful adventures while in port. Throughout the day, we dined on delicious cuisine and sipped herbal teas. In the evening, we watched and listened to theatrical performances, multi-talented musicians, and a hilarious comedian. We returned home without any health issues and with an abundance of memories.

As more and more people become receptive to worldwide travel opportunities, I encourage individuals to spring back into travel by taking a cruise. It is an amazing way to experience multiple destinations without having to pack and unpack numerous times.



Multi-talented Greta Salóme, an Icelandic singer/songwriter and master of the violin.



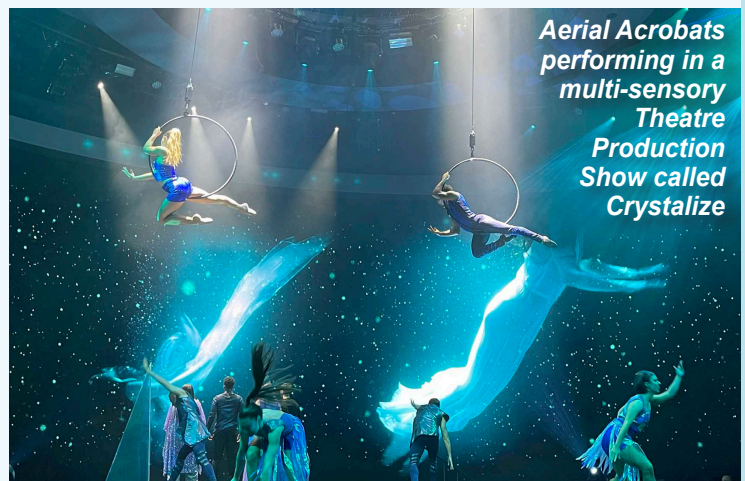
Sampling a Luminae Restaurant Appetizer



Eating Healthy at the Luminae Restaurant Aboard Celebrity Apex



Tasting a local favorite-- a Salt Fish Cake



Aerial Acrobats performing in a multi-sensory Theatre Production Show called Crystalize

Disclosure: The United States Virgin Islands Department of Tourism hosted The Traveling Bornsteins' day tour of the island.