

## LETTERS

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### Fun on a Disney Charter Cruise

Being an avid cruiser, I had always been curious about charter cruises. Last summer I was able to experience one, and I can assure you it won't be the last.

Here is a typical day on a charter cruise: Snapping a selfie with a celebrity... attending a Q&A session with an artist...getting autographs for your collection...making friends with people who share your interests.

Charter cruises provide opportunities to enjoy the fun of sailing to the max, with special entertainment and activities, chances to rub elbows with celebrities, and other features themed to an interest, along with instant camaraderie with like-minded cruisers. Popular annual ones are the Malt Shop Memories Cruise ([www.maltshopcruise.com](http://www.maltshopcruise.com)), a nod to the time when the malt shop was the center of our universe, and the '70s Rock and Romance Cruise ([www.rockandromancecruise.com](http://www.rockandromancecruise.com)) celebrating that special decade.

The charter cruise I took was a Disney Vacation Club (DVC) members cruise ([www.disneyvacationclub.disney.go.com](http://www.disneyvacationclub.disney.go.com)). The DVC is a vacation timeshare program owned by Disney Signature Experiences, and this cruise for DVC members was a celebration of all things Disney. It took us on a four-night sailing to the Bahamas from Port Canaveral on Disney Cruise Line's *Disney Dream*.

In addition to hob-knobbing with the most famous mouse in the world and his pals, including Minnie, Donald Duck and Pluto, posing for photos with them and getting their autographs, we took part in special events created for the cruise. These included a full advance screening of Disney's live-action feature film *Christopher Robin* opening in theaters days later. The movie, presented in the ship's Walt Disney Theatre, stars Ewan McGregor (of TV's *Fargo* series) as Christopher Robin. In all, 35 Disney legends, artists, entertainers and personalities in various fields participated in activities during the cruise. They included Walt Disney Animation Studios' Josie Trinidad, head of story for *Ralph Breaks the Internet*, *Wreck-It Ralph 2*, who presented a behind-the-scenes look at the comedy film that opened in theaters last fall.

Other events included a talk by Pete Docter and Michael Giacchino, the director and composer of Pixar Animation Studios' *Up* and *Inside Out*, on how these Academy Award-winning movies developed from scene to score. In a Cooking in the Atrium presentation with chef Art Smith (who worked as Oprah Winfrey's chef for a decade) and food-and-wine personality Marcy Carriker Smothers (author of *Eat Like Walt*), the celebrities shared stories and created a macaroni Mickey mousse. There were talks by screenwriter Jared Bush (Disney Animation Studios' *Zootopia* and *Moana*) and by Roy Patrick Disney (son of Disney

executive Roy E. Disney and grandson of company co-founder Roy O. Disney), who shared what it was like to "grow up Disney."

Entertainment included not the usual one, but two editions of Disney's fireworks at sea. A Member Mouse Party on deck celebrated 90 years of Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse with not only the famous characters in attendance but also voice actors—among them Bret Iwan, the voice of Mickey Mouse, and Bill Farmer, the voice of Goofy and Pluto.

A special exhibit for Mickey and Minnie fans from Treasures of the Walt Disney Archives displayed authentic artifacts associated with the world's most famous mice, including a vintage Mickey Mouse plush doll that Walt Disney was often photographed with. Yet other special offerings were a concert in the show lounge with Disney On Broadway stars like Ashley Brown (Broadway's original Mary Poppins).

Other surprises were commemorative in-room gifts delivered every day, including tote bags, beach umbrellas, wireless speakers, Christopher Robin T-shirts and DVC Member Cruise caps.

Two DVC Member Cruises have been announced for 2019—a five-night Pacific Coast sailing on the *Disney Wonder* from San Diego May 15-20 (ports of call include San Francisco and Victoria before ending in Vancouver); and a seven-night Bermuda cruise on the *Disney Magic* from New York City from October 5-12.

I liked the sailing so much that whether a DVC voyage or some other one, I feel another charter cruise will be on the horizon for me!

Georgina Cruz  
Vero Beach, FL

### Memories of Hawaii

My wife and I were delighted to see the article on American Hawaii Cruises in the September/October issue. We took a cruise on the *Independence* from March 13-20, 1993. This was our first trip to Hawaii, and it was a delight to see the islands of Hawaii, Kauai, Maui and Oahu. Highlights included Pearl Harbor, Waikiki, a luau, volcanoes and snorkeling.

The significance of this sailing is that the *Independence* was the first cruise ship allowed to dock at Kauai after Hurricane Iniki hit the island on September 11, 1992. (Yes, September 11.) So, we were among the first tourists to see the damage from the hurricane. We remember seeing concrete slabs where houses used to exist. Damage everywhere. I am sure the locals were glad to see us, as the tourist business was hurting.

This was our second cruise and was preceded by a 1991 *Sovereign of the Seas* voyage. What a difference! Our room (No. 444) originally must have been third class, or steerage, when the *Independence* was an ocean liner. While the class distinction was no longer, our walks to the upper areas of the ship were interesting at best; it must have been a difficult conversion for the construction engineers. Our room had two berths

(bunk beds in our lingo). But we were young and just laughed it off and enjoyed the ship.

We had great fun onboard. There were hula dancers, and my wife Eileen won the hula hoop contest!

Doug & Eileen King  
Manhattan, KS

### Gulf Coast Cruising

The news item on California Coast cruising in the September/October 2018 issue of *Cruise Travel* intrigued me. If there's a market for Princess Cruises to have itineraries visiting several ports on the West Coast (Seattle, Astoria, San Francisco, Monterey, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles and San Diego) with stops in Vancouver or Ensenada, I'd think there would be a similar market on the Gulf Coast.

It would be great if cruisers from Galveston, New Orleans, Mobile and Tampa could visit each of the other ports and Key West with stops in Mexico or the Caribbean. I notice that each of the Gulf ports has at least half of the days each month with no ship in port.

Gerald Miller  
Via email

*The short reason there are no Gulf of Mexico cruises is that they are not legal. The Passenger Vessel Services Act prohibits foreign-flag ships from transporting U.S. passengers between American ports. (All major cruise ships, as you may know, are foreign-flagged.) Conceivably, a roundtrip could be offered if a foreign port were called on, but that might be too costly fuel-wise. Calling in the Yucatan looks like the closest possibility. When would the season be? There are not that many good winter beach days in Galveston and Mobile. And we doubt there's a market. If there were, some line would have tried it by now.*

### Friends of Bill

In 1993 I was recently divorced and decided to take my first cruise. I was and still am a recovering alcoholic, and attend Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings on a regular basis. Needless to say, I was concerned about vacation plans that included exposure to a drinking environment—and seven days without a meeting to attend.

I was pleasantly surprised to find in the daily newsletter "Friends of Bill" meetings. (Bill Wilson was one of the founders of AA).

During one of my seven cruises, at the start of our meeting, a woman burst through the door and asked, "Who is Bill? That guy has been on every cruise I've been on." Following a short explanation, she made a sheepish retreat. Thus, the reason we remain "Anonymous."

My first stop on a cruise is at Guest Relations to find my meetings. To my fellow "friends"—rest assured that you'll have meetings to attend.

AA Member, Augusta, GA

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