

# Around the World Wrap-Up

By Richard Seale

## Several surprises as the round-the-world cruise comes to an end

*Pine Knoll Shores residents Linda and Richard Seale are back at home in Pine Knoll Shores after their round-the-world cruise and share this final installment of their reports on their trip of a lifetime.*

From Crete, we wound back east into the Aegean Sea to Mykonos, one of the 300 Cycladic islands. This is one of many beautiful Greek Aegean islands of sparkling white dwellings with blue roofs and brightly colored stairways and doors in a sparkly sea of crystal clear water. Since the main town has the same name as the island, the Greeks nicknamed the town "Chora."

In the old-town section, old nonoperational windmills beg to have their photos taken. A shoreline section is known as "Little Venice," and winding narrow lanes make up a maze through the residential houses to implement an anti-pirate design. We had a calamari lunch on the waterfront and then took several nice walks through the old city residential areas, enjoying how easy it was to get lost in the labyrinthine lanes. Linda fell while trying to set up a church photo, but luckily she was not seriously hurt. Though tempting to do otherwise, a cardinal rule of travel photography is to *always* stand still to take a photo, or at least never be looking through your view finder while moving. It is all too easy to trip and fall and ruin a trip.

**Palm Sunday in Malta.** From Greece we went west across the Mediterranean to Malta and the town of Valetta. This town has a pretty harbor, and as was usual for port arrivals, we were out on the Deck 6 open bow area at 6:15 a.m. Despite some wild winds and waves, the views of the forts and city walls were worth the effort. Once docked, a tour took us past the Blue Grottoes at Zurrieq, a sea arch area with good scuba diving. We then went on to the temples of Mnajdra at Hagar Qim to walk around, and through, the oldest manmade buildings on earth. These buildings were constructed 5,000 years ago—1,000 years before the pyramids. How did these ancient people form rocks into large blocks and move 20-ton boulders into place? No one knows.

After a local lunch, we got to walk about in Mdina, Malta's original capital. Malta has a very strategic location and has been subjected to occupations by a long list of foreign nations, the last being Great Britain. St. Paul was shipwrecked on a nearby islet and he remained to preach and convert people to Christianity for several years. The Knights of St. John, an order dating back to the Crusades, moved to Malta and built the town fortifications and walls and a palace for their Grand Master in 1574.

It was Palm Sunday, and as we walked we were regaled by many church bells celebrating this day. During WWII the Germans bombed Malta for many months and the population suffered greatly, but the Maltese held on. King George of England had a special medal designed to commemorate their bravery and sacrifices, which we know as the Cross of George, or the Maltese Cross. It is seen on the flag.

A day's sail brought us to Spain's Palma de Mallorca, the largest of several Balearic Islands. The large Cathedral of Palma, complete with flying buttresses, was visible from the port. Once ashore, we saw a beautiful reflection of the cathedral in a lake. Our tour took us high up in the Sierra de Tremontana mountains to the town of Valldemosa via a narrow, twisting lane perched on many a cliff edge. We toured the La Cartuja Monastery of 1399, with its lovely church. Frederic Chopin spent 1838-1839 in a rented cell in the monastery and wrote several well-known pieces of music there, including his second ballade and his third scherzo. We enjoyed a lovely live piano performance of some of his pieces written here in the monastery. Spring had sprung and the gardens were beautiful, as was the weather on the day of our visit. We returned to Palma for a local lunch and to walk its narrow lanes for several hours before reboarding the ship.

From Mallorca we headed north into Barcelona. It was Linda's birthday and the ship and our group gave her a nice party, which she enjoyed greatly despite her black eyes from the fall. The highlight of this stop was the opportunity to view and study the architectural work of Antoni Gaudi. His most spectacular is La Sagrada Familia cathedral, which he described as his stone bible. He built two residences, Casa Batilo and Casa Milo, better known as La Pedrera. His planned development failed financially, but it was turned into a park called Park Guell. Over two days, Linda and I really delved into these projects with both inside and outside tours. Gaudi's creations must be

experienced. Words, and even photographs, are inadequate. It is rumored that some of the roof ventilation forms he designed are the basis for the Star Wars storm troopers. Records show George Lucas did visit this house.

It was a disappointment to learn we would pass the Strait of Gibraltar in the middle of the night. Twelve of us got up at 1 a.m. and stayed up until 2:30 a.m. to take in the few lights that were lit on Gibraltar at that hour. We could see very little of "the rock." Across from Gibraltar in Morocco stood a neon sign written in huge Arabic script, which showed the words "GOD, NATION, KING," a sort of "in your face" from Muslim Morocco to Christian Spain.

Passing out of Gibraltar we headed north into Cadiz, which is where Columbus set sail in 1493 and 1496. We did not stay in Cadiz, but had planned a tour to Seville. In this town, its Moorish (Arab) and Christian heritage remain in blended architecture. Our tour centered on highlighting the architectural counterpoints of these cultures so diametrically opposed but preserved in buildings, paintings and other art in the Royal Palace or Alcazar. Everywhere was very busy since it was Holy Week.

**Easter in Casablanca.** Next port of call, ironically on Easter Sunday, was Casablanca. It was strange to be up for an Easter sunrise service on the ship as it entered port, while hearing the broadcast of the day's first call to prayers for Muslims as it echoed through the city from the nearby Great Mosque in Casablanca. This is a land of 34 million people, 98% of whom are Muslim Moroccans. To be a Moroccan you must be born there, and supposedly there is no naturalization protocol. We were treated well and our guide taught us "Salaam Aleko," which means "Peace be with you." We walked the Great Mosque built right on the Atlantic shores, capable of handling 25,000 people praying inside and 80,000 people praying outside in the square. Our guide told us about the Muslim shoulder-sitting score-keeper angels, one for keeping track of "good points" and one for "bad points." We had never heard of this aspect of Islam before. He also said that the Koran specifies that killing anyone is a straight ticket to hell. I asked him then why don't all Muslims get together and stamp out the extremist Muslim groups that are killing Muslims as well as others. He never answered that question.

The last port of call was Funchal, Madeira Island, Portugal. After a very steep and treacherous climb by our bus, of course, we had some "Madeira, my dear" at the Barbeito Winery on the top of a mountain. The refreshment was particularly good, as we discovered a mechanic working on the bus's clutch upon our exit from the winery. We made it down without incident and over to Cabo Girao, the second highest sea cliff in the world. Here we got to stand on a glass pane platform that is 1,902 free-fall feet above the boulder-strewn beach straight below. We survived that, too. After a pleasant visit to Camara de Lobos, one of Winston Churchill's favorite fishing villages to which he came to do his oil painting, it was back to Funchal for a three-hour lunch and some "walk abouts." As the day ended, we boarded ship for the last time and headed west for Fort Lauderdale, a seven-day sail away.

**Final statistics and observations.** In summary, we did cover 30,171 nautical miles, 5,000 more miles than around the world at the equator. We were onboard ship for all but one night, which was in Beijing, China. Sixty-seven days were "sea days"—that is 24 hours on the ship. On 47 days we had normally daytime hours off the ship in ports of call. In our Road Scholar group of 65, we had to send five folks home due to inju-

(Continued on page 6)



**PHYSICAL THERAPY • OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY  
SPEECH THERAPY • SKILLED NURSING • RESTORATIVE NURSING**

4010 Bridges St. Ext. Morehead City • 252-726-0031 • [www.crystalbluffs.com](http://www.crystalbluffs.com)

