

Christmas Cruise

By Jill Cross

My family and I had wanted to take a cruise for some time and finally took the plunge this past Christmas. I'm extremely happy we made our trip before the terrible tragedy in Italy where a cruise ship sank. We may not have taken a cruise after seeing pictures of that huge ship sinking.

Looking at the pictures of the interior was weird for us as it was almost a duplicate of the ship we traveled on same décor, same exact size. But ours was not a European cruise. We took the Dream Carnival to Mexico for Christmas and had a terrific time.

We feel lucky for many reasons as we've heard many cruise line horror stories about things that can go wrong and ruin one's trip. Our trip was perfect. The weather, most importantly, was calm, which gave us a nice even-keel sail, and having a room with a balcony made all the difference. We watched the sun come up every morning with a fresh pot of coffee from room service (free!!) while our daughter slept in. We watched flying fish and dolphin at play nine stories below us. Incidentally, the beds were more comfortable than our beds at home that was a surprise.

Our first stop was in Cozumel, where we took beach buggies for a five-hour jaunt, which included snorkeling and lunch on a beautiful deserted beach. Our



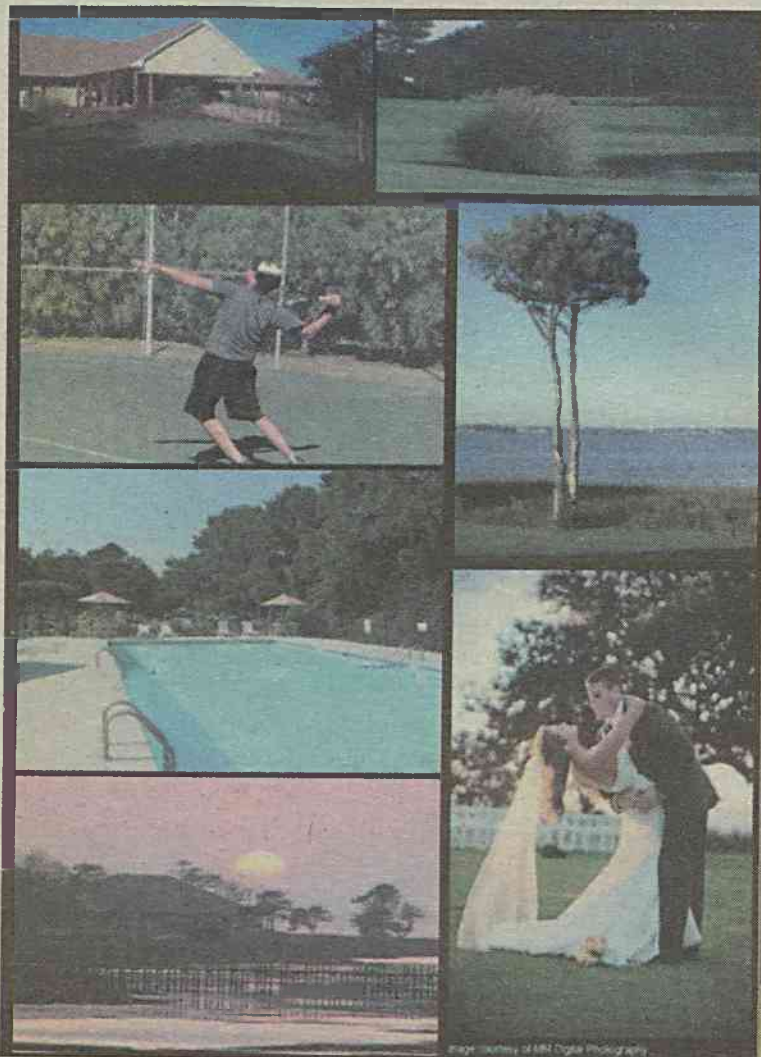
second stop was our favorite Belize. None of us had ever seen a real life jungle before, so zip lining above it was a definite highlight for us in addition to the cave tubing we did at the same venue. Our third stop was a relaxing beach day in Mahogany Bay. We took a taxi out of the attractive shopping complex to see the real island. Last, but not least, we stopped in Costa Mayo, where I swam with a dolphin and had a glorious time. The shopping was plentiful and used up every last minute as we only had half a day since the ship's horn was due to blow at 2:30 p.m. for departure.

It takes a day and a half for the return trip. The last day at sea was relaxing and fun as there was always tons of entertainment available. The variety shows were excellent. For Christmas, there was even snow falling from the 12th floor bubbles that resembled snow exactly, and the ship was decorated beautifully.

The food was delicious and varied. There was a fully equipped gym to counteract all the food one consumes daily. I quickly learned that the spa became cheaper as the cruise progressed, so I took full advantage of that luxury on the last day.

Something interesting happened on our voyage home. We passed a sinking boat and the captain had to turn around to see if assistance was needed. It turned out that the crew had been evacuated already. We nearly joined the sinking boat as everyone on the ship ran to the same side to view it, and I thought we were going to topple over!

All in all, it was a wonderful trip, which will provide us with a lovely memory to save forever after. We booked our trip through Dove Travel in Emerald Isle and appreciated the good choice the agent helped us make for our maiden voyage.



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