

Ray's Caribbean cruise



When my wife and I were planning a 'big' holiday to celebrate our 20th wedding anniversary we chose a Caribbean Cruise (24 nights, cruising to and from Southampton with P&O on the Aurora) because it offered total relaxation from the moment we arrived at the cruise terminal.

Our luggage disappeared, re-appearing in our cabin a couple of hours later, our car was driven off to the parking compound, and we headed on board to check out our cabin – fully accessible as promised.

We are huge cruise fans (this was our fourth) as the holiday starts immediately. Where a flight is involved we never relax until we, the luggage and my wheelchair arrive at our destination (the chair went AWOL on one trip to Lanzarote, arriving three days later) and I've got into the bathroom. I've lost count of the times we've had to take the door off to get into the supposedly accessible bathroom!

All aboard!

The Aurora was fabulous! The access was brilliant. I could do laps of the deck and access the sports court unaided, playing cricket every day we were at sea.

We were realistic about what we might be able to see and do during our stops in the Caribbean – on Antigua, St Lucia, Barbados, Dominica and St Maarten, so booked three accessible tours with P&O before we left the UK. This was the one and only disaster on the trip.

A computer glitch meant the accessible tour bookings were not transferred from the UK, so we could not go on any organised trips. We did receive compensation but this in no way made up for the loss of the tours which would have been by accessible van.

St Lucia was a lovely island and instead of trying to find an accessible cab, we enjoyed the shopping, music and rum punch on offer nearer the cruise terminal while soaking up some Caribbean sun.

Barbados was magical. Fiona went on a turtle snorkelling trip in the morning while I topped up my tan. Then we met up and walked along the waterways into the centre of Bridgetown where we ate lunch overlooking the water. Barbados is more developed and commercialised than Antigua and St Lucia and consequently much better geared up for wheelchairs. There were plenty of normal-sized taxis and pathways and ramps clearly marked for wheelchair users.

St Maarten – our last Caribbean stop – was fabulous and we could happily have spent a week there. The weather was glorious, paths to and from the cruise port were flat and easy to negotiate

and it really encapsulated what we had expected of a Caribbean island – sun, sea, sand, reggae music and rum punch. We had a very happy day enjoying all of these things! The beach was firm enough to push on so I could have transferred onto a sun bed and relaxed if I'd wanted to.

En route to the Caribbean we had stopped at Ponta Delgado in the Azores and on the return leg we stopped in Madeira – a fabulous place with an accessible cable car, accessible buses and great shops and markets.

We had an amazing trip, and the icing on the cake (literally!) was renewing our vows in front of the Captain – one thing P&O got right, ensuring it was a real holiday to remember.

Ray Cross