

CRUISING

I'm not sure that April is the best month to go on vacation. I trust you're not like some people who say "You're retired so you are on perpetual vacation." Most of you who know us know that isn't true. Sometimes I wonder if it's worthwhile as we try to juggle meetings and this event against that event. We have to keep two calendars active. My family, when they visit, are astonished at the range of activities but agree that it probably keeps us feeling young.

I muttered about this to Valerie on Sunday evening as we drove home from Toronto in the pouring rain and fog. Two things made us make the drive as we had just spent twelve days cruising in the Caribbean, one we missed our dog Buffy who was staying with friends and also a sense of heroism enjoyed by the postman where "Neither snow nor sleet nor dark of night shall keep us from our appointed task".

Cruising is one of our preferred vacations and this time we had picked Cozumel, Grand Cayman, Jamaica, the Panama Canal and Costa Rica as the ports of call with a land tour in each. We picked a cruise line we had not used before and on the whole it ranks as the most enjoyable holiday we have had in a long time.

Things picked up right from the start. Last time we had to fly to Florida the wait at Toronto Airport stretched to hours as we inched our way through American Customs. It was with a feeling of dread that we hauled our suitcases from the airline desk to the dreaded customs area. There was no line up!! We headed for a booth marked Canadian Citizens, remarked on the speed to the officer who said "We have re-organized the process to speed it up." We agreed it had worked as we pocketed our passports. The cruise line had also filed a form on us on the customs computer which also helped. We soon, at Ft Lauderdale port, had our photo ID and electronic door opener and proceeded to our state room and our holiday had begun even though we wouldn't sail for about five hours.

I won't bore you with details of ship board living except that Valerie had really only two major requests which were met. We must have a bathtub as well as a shower and a bed with a duvet cover. A sitting area, balcony were givens and the two TVs an added luxury.

We had pre selected our shore packages based primarily on learning as much about the country as possible. One of our tour guides kept repeating that, "You can't learn about a country in one day, but you can learn enough to return and

stay awhile". He was right but we did pick up a lot of information and history of the area.

The Mayan ruins at Tulum were fascinating. The Mayans had invented the calendar some 5,000 years ago and even today doctors use a version of their 9 month birth calendar to determine gestation dates for our new borns. Grand Cayman, which we had visited before, has the highest per capita income in the Caribbean and is a world banking centre. We travelled down the reef in a submarine and gazed down on the Cayman Trench some 2,800 feet below us.

Our next port at Limon, Costa Rica took us to the Rain Forest and a trip through the tree tops on an aerial tramway with professional naturalists as guides. We later walked on a trail at the forest floor to see the various flora and fauna. The instructions were to bring some rain gear and insect repellent which we ignored and luckily no rain fell even though they said it rained almost every day with an annual rain fall of 25 feet! Surprisingly we didn't get bitten even though the guide showed us a big ant which if it bites you – you are in big trouble. I must say Valerie who had sandals on watched where she stepped.

The next stop at the Panama Canal was to me, at least, the most interesting. Our ship went through the first set of locks and anchored in the man made Lake Gatun. We set out for the Pacific Coast and Panama City by bus and returned several hours later by train to Cristobal to re board the ship.

This canal is considered by many as the eighth wonder of the world and was completed in the early 1900's. The millions of gallons of water that are daily needed to operate the locks are provided solely by gravity from man made lakes. Flow from the lake also generates the electricity needed to operate the system, the homes and commerce of the Canal Zone. Quite Fabulous!

We then headed for our next and last stop Jamaica but docked at Ocho Rios this time. We visited the gardens and the Dunn's River Falls and watched as lots of people formed chains behind the guides and actually climbed the falls – good luck. Then we sailed back to Florida. A truly great vacation being pampered by cruise staff, entertained at Broadway shows, eating and eating marvellous food and meeting some very interesting people.

It was interesting that we had been just north of the equator where it rains all the time and had no rain so; of course, the fates couldn't let us get away with that. So when we flew

Continued on page 8