

Women Solo: Are Cruise Ships a Good Venue?

By Patti Morrow
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As someone who frequently travels alone, I'd never considered taking a cruise. For one thing, I'm prone to motion sickness and the thought of being out in the middle of the ocean with no escape for stabilization was not appealing. In addition, spending just one day at an exotic location didn't seem like it would be enough. My last fear was whether there would be enough activities for people traveling solo.

I recently set out to get some answers by booking a 5-day cruise on the Carnival ship Triumph (yes, *that* Triumph – the embattled ship that was plastered all over the news due to an extended breakdown) departing from the Port of Galveston for the Mexican Caribbean.

Here are my conclusions:

1. Solo is Not Necessarily Single

Many women traveling solo do not want to take single cruises because they are not necessarily single and not interested in “dating opportunities.” Women traveling solo are a rapidly growing segment of tourism, but with the exception of a few ground-tour women-only groups, they remain largely unnoticed and un-marketed.

The Carnival cruise was not a singles cruise, however, I did meet other women on board who were traveling together and spending time, laughing, and eating meals with these women really added a lot to my enjoyment on the trip.

2. State Rooms

I had an interior stateroom which was pleasant and very clean. The bathroom was clean and functional, although a bit dated. No regrets considering the price, but I would chose accommodations with an ocean-view window or balcony next time.

3. Cleanliness

Every area I encountered was very clean and there were constantly staff around cleaning and tidying.

4. Staff

Exceptional, from Yuri my waiter every night in the Paris dining room to my stateroom cleaning staff. Not only efficient, they were very friendly and remembered my name from day one. The activities director was entertaining, engaging and approachable.

5. Food

As I'd heard, the food was abundant and overall pretty good. I overate, no surprise there. Simple pleasures being the best, my favorite thing was the 24-hour availability of coffee and ice cream, but the two new additions – Guy's Burger Joint (Guy Fieri, the blonde spike-haired TV food critic) and the make-your-own Tacos from Blue Iguana Cantina

provided quick access to gastronomical delight. My formal dinners in the Paris Dining Room provided something unusual to try every night, such as alligator fritters (which were delicious).

6. Ports of Destination

The first port was Progreso, Mexico – an authentic, colorful Mexican beach town with crystal clear emerald water. The beach area right off the pier was festive, with outdoor restaurants lining the malécon offering delicious tapas and margaritas while mariachi bands added to the jolly atmosphere. In contrast, a 10-minute walk along the coast and you're at your own private palapa-lined beach. The beach is also less than a block away from the small downtown area offering more restaurants and rows of open-air shops selling local handcrafts and souvenirs. There are also options for excursions to nearby Mayan ruins which could be obtained on the cruise ship or in the downtown area.



The second port was Cozumel, Mexico – an island in the Caribbean Sea just south of Cancun with brilliant turquoise water. The shopping area right off the cruise pier is a bit commercial and geared towards higher-end duty-free products rather than hand-crafted local goods. There weren't any good beaches directly near where the ship was docked; you had to drive or purchase an excursion to get to the better beaches. Nearby Isla Passion was a popular day-trip choice, as well as boat trips for snorkeling and diving around the coral reef – the second largest in the world.

7. At Sea

There were quite a few things to do on the days the ship was cruising. My only suggestion would be that offer more free activities. For example, it would have been nice to have access to free classes like Zumba and Latin dancing. Detailed lectures with photos on the port destinations would have been beneficial. The only port information was a one-hour session that reviewed the same Carnival's shore excursions listed the brochures in the room. At night, there were a variety of fun entertainment options, from comedy shows to musical venues to suit every taste.

Since this was a "working (research) vacation," I must admit, I had one of the most inspirational "offices" in which to write!

8. Value

Carnival Cruises are in the lower price range. The price I paid (less than \$500 for the five-day cruise) is less than \$100 a day for room and most meals. Try finding that kind of a deal with a decent ground hotel and all-you-can eat restaurants!

The cost of alcoholic drinks are not included, which can add quite a bit to the end bill for hearty partiers; I'm not much of a drinker, so it was not a problem for me.

Bottom line, I enjoyed the cruise, and I would go on another. I did get a flavor of the destinations I visited without the hassle of checking into multiple hotels, and never once felt my safety was compromised.

Cruises are a no hassle way for women traveling solo to visit multiple destinations – waking up each morning in a new location, without flying, no hotel check ins, no lugging baggage around saves a lot of time and frustration.