

Subj: Panama Party #1 -Partial Panama Cruise -Mon, 19 Dec -Thurs, 29 Dec, 2011
Date: 12/29/2011

Hello Everyone! We're having another wonderful vacation in the Caribbean! This time our only travel companions are Dan & Sandi Schneider and we're having a fabulous, fabulous time!! First time to cruise with them, hope it's not our last!!!

First of all, we finished our Fall Mesa Season with our annual Holiday Dance! It was a smash bang success!! We even had a special guest -Dick's daughter Linda came to visit with us and other than not being a dancer, she just fit right in! She's helpful, witty, & wonderfully friendly! It was a great night, huge crowd and way way too much food!!











Our new German cows with Lederhosen fit right in!!



Got to thank Dick publicly as usual. What ever would we do without him???? Hope we don't have to find out!!

Then we had 2 nice easy days to pack and flew to Ft Lauderdale on Sunday. Met Dan & Sandi at the Crown Plaza Hotel and stayed up way to late anticipating our fun beginning!!

The next morning we took a taxi to Port Everglades and found a long que waiting for us! Thought that was a bit unusual and sure enough found that the ship had stopped on the way in on Sunday and picked up 20 Cuban refugees. They ranged from age 3 to 80 and were all in a bad way medically since they had not had food or water for 4 days. The cruise folks fed them, washed their clothes,

gave them medical attention and then turned them over to the Coast Guard on Monday morning!! Unfortunately for the refugees, since they were "feet wet," they were to be immediately returned to Cuba. Hope they will be okay! Anyway, what that meant for us was that things, were a little behind. Not to worry, Princess was soon right back on track and it only took us a bit more than an hour and we were on board and in our rooms.



We had adjoining mini suites with balcony's. Beautiful view of the Ft Lauderdale port!





Had on Life boat drill early on -about 3:15pm and then we were drinking our welcome aboard champagne and ready for the fun to begin!!!! What a life!!





George sent out a few last emails while the rest of us unpacked!



Really nice rooms!!



We watch a Royal Caribbean ship leave before us as we enjoyed a beautiful sunset.



AOL has already cut off the pictures, so done for now! Will continue with our first 2 days at sea and first port of Aruba!!!

Wish you were here!!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

Subj: Panama Party #2 -Partial Panama Cruise, Dec 2011
Date: 12/29/2011

Happy Holidays everyone!!!
And we'll continue right where I left off!!! We were out on our balcony enjoying our sunset departure.
Even that was a little late, supposed to leave at 4pm and it was more like 5pm.



The beautiful sunset even made the smokestacks of the factories around the port look good with the plane taking off in the background!!



Goodbye Miami!!



We changed for dinner (early seating at 5:45pm) and then explored the ship enroute. It's beautifully decorated for Christmas!!



After dinner we went dancing and Sandi was selected by the band's lead singer for some special attention! Then we danced the first evening away -checking out the venues we would have to choose from!!





It was a great first day introduction!! We are very happy with all the bands and the dance floors are bigger than we had expected! Yippee!! Our second day, I joined the morning Zumba class while George caught up on his sleep (Dan & Sandi elected to treadmill it!! Only day's excitement was a wine tasting. It was a nice selection of champagnes, chardonnay's, cabernet's. One was a 2001 that the ship sells for \$135 a bottle!! Nope we did not buy any!!! Had very fancy hordoerves -duck pate', lobster, shrimp, and luckily for me an assortment of yummy cheeses!! Strangely enough, we ended up at a table with a couple from Scottsdale, AZ!! Thought that was a funny coincidence!!



The evening was formal! Only 2 of them this cruise. Felt nice to get all dolled up!!



Also enjoyed the Captain's party in the Atrium with their famous champagne glass fountain. You could wait in line for a chance to stand with the Co-Captain and pour champagne on the top of the fountain while they took your picture. Hummm???? Nope, didn't do that either!

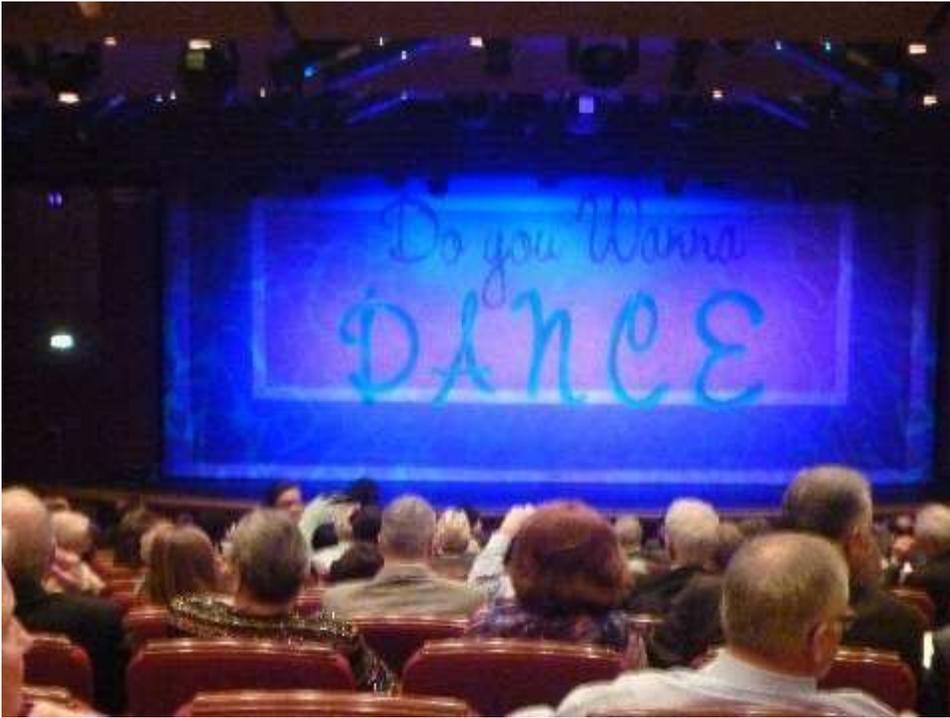




The Captain introduced his head staff and toasted us for the Holidays. He's Italian and speaks very good English!



We went to our first major production show -the theatre is gorgeous and the singing/dancing troupe was marvelous!! And of course being a selection of types of dancing, we enjoyed it very much!!!



We went out dancing again ourselves and we're still loving the dance venues. Even found that the Bayou Cafe (a speciality Steak House) has little dance floor that we can enjoy. A great Jazz band (4 elderly black Jazz musicians -look like they have been playing/singing together for 50 years!!) played some lovely music that sounds like it is straight from New Orleans!!

And so our second day ended!! Very relaxing and tooo very happy!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

Subj: Panama Party #3 -Partial Panama Cruise, Dec 2011

Date: 12/29/2011

Good Morning Everyone!

We had another relaxing day at sea. It was actually fairly rough at sea. Didn't bother any of us, but bounced us around a bit. Tried to get some pictures, but by the time I went out on the balcony it had smoothed down a bit. They did have "bags" up all around the ship and the dining room was a little emptier due to some folks feeling a little ill. Not stormy or anything, just rough seas.



No special events -Dan & Sandi went to a Panama Canal lecture. I did Zumba again and George finished up our Cha's cuesheet. We had had 2 excellent evening meals and wondered how they would keep up!! First night was melt in the mouth Prime rib and the second night was supposed choice of filet mignon, lobster & tiger shrimp, or halibut. However, we ordered all 3 and shared them. Oink, oink!! Really wonderful. The 3rd meal was just as good! We all ordered what they called "rack of veal." It was basically a veal chop? Wonderful!



I had creme brulee' for dessert (well must admit that scoop of pistachio icecream is mine too!! Total heaven!!



Our waiter, Billmar, is great fun!



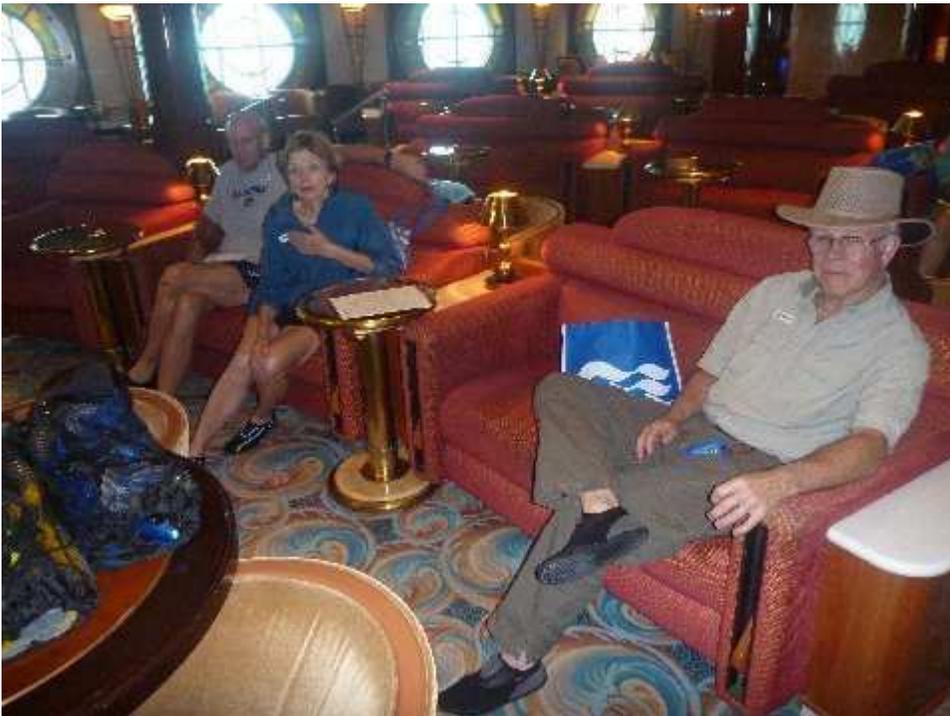
We were a happy happy table!!



We had a silly comedian, Billy Vader, for entertainment. He kept us in stitches. This picture is actually of the Cruise Director, the one of the comedian didn't come out all that well.



We danced some more and called it a night fairly early since we had a 7:30am show for our Aruba snorkeling excursion. We got up at 6am & had breakfast delivered to the room (english muffin with egg, cheese, & canadian bacon) and headed to the Aft lounge to meet for the excursion! It's too early in the morning!!!!



We were soon led off board and took a short walk to a docked snorkel boat. Boarded & took straight off! Immediately got our gear and started suiting up for the snorkel!



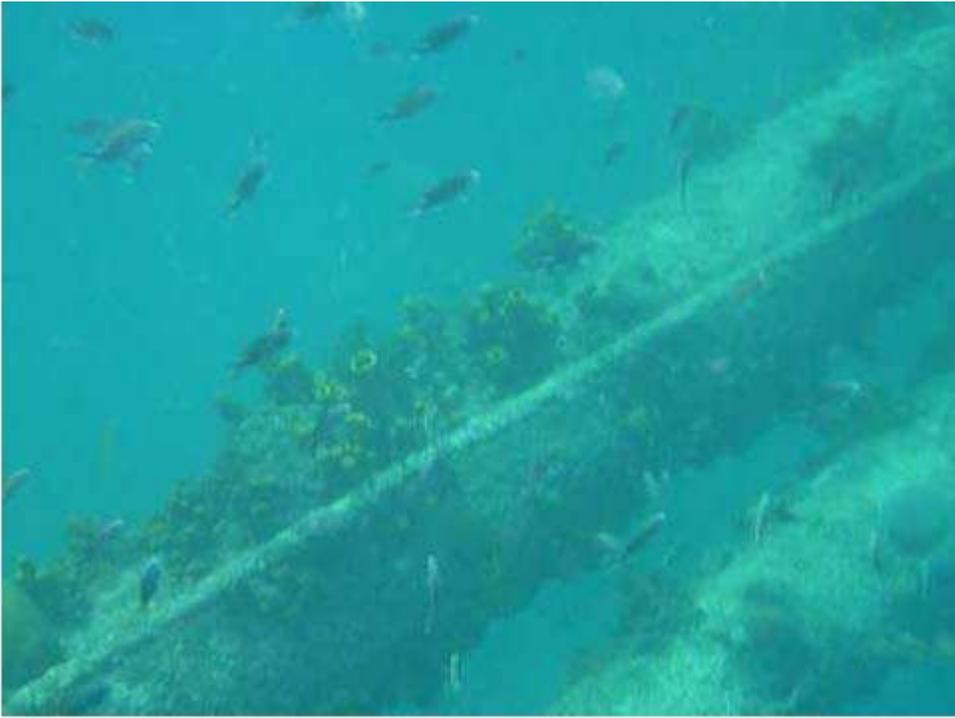
The day was beautiful, but the boat was stuffed full of folks and the water was a little rough.



I was the first off the front of the boat down the ladder and Dan & Sandi followed me shortly after. George jumped off the front and swam around to meet us!



We were to snorkel over a WWII German vessel (Antilles) which was purposely scuttled by the Captain to keep it from their enemies. We've snorkeled here before with Liz & Jeff (4 years ago), but didn't really recognize it. The water was fairly murky, but the main problem was all the people!!!! We've never been in such a crowd of snorkelers! We were like bumper cars! Made Sandi uncomfortable (plus their snorkels were very short, so with the rough water, it was a tough snorkel!!!), so she cut it short. The rest of us muscled through it. Didn't get any really good pictures, but sure loved being able to take the underwater photos!!!







Apparently a pelican came to visit the boat while we were out! Also, note the name of the snorkel boat!! Rumba!! How appropriate is that!!



I took a picture right at water level of a pirate snorkeling ship anchored near us.



The famous lighthouse in the distance with some of the other ship's snorkelers. There were 4 boats over the wreck while we were there. Must have been 200 snorkelers. Crazy!! Still had a good time. This was our only snorkel for this cruise. We still brought our own equipment. Made it much more pleasant!!



The sail back was beautiful! Danced a little to the Caribbean music and George played bartender when the crew were working on the sails!!







The Island Princess looked sooooo pretty against the dock. And then we walked around "downtown" a little and it looked huge at the end of the street!!







Back on board we had a quick slice of pizza and watched the island disappear in the distance. Birds chased the ship out!

Oops, AOL won't let me get the last few pictures in! Oh well! I'll get them loaded onto Shutterfly as soon as we get back!!

Hope you guys are having a wonderful Christmas Holiday!! We certainly are!!!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

Subj: Panama Party #4 -Partial Panama Cruise, Dec 2011

Date: 12/29/2011

Hello Everyone! It's almost Christmas -even in the Caribbean! Although it's hard to tell by the weather!! It's in the high 80's with plentiful sunshine!!! The average annual temperature here is 82!! We arrived in Cartagena, Columbia around 9am, and we off the boat shortly thereafter. Dan & Sandi had chosen a different tour, so we headed on separate adventures. I had chosen a combination canoe trip in the mangroves and old town walking tour. We loaded on the bus first to head to the mangrove area on the eastern side of Cartagena. Even enjoyed some entertaining scenery from the bus on the dock!!!



I think they were mostly there for photography (they charged for their pictures), but they were interesting anyway. By the way, the fruit was real because we saw a guide grab a tangerine off of one of the girls heads and eat it!! Anyway, the drive sounded rather sedate and for the first half hour we were mostly stuck in traffic. Crazy crazy traffic. Similar to what we've seen in Egypt and just last fall in Russia!!





Notice the guy on the sidewalk???



Our guide told us that gas was about \$4 a gallon and the average monthly salary was \$300 US. Hummmm??? Doesn't work well, huh? Consequently there were lots and lots and lots of motorcycles and they did not play by the standard rules of the road! Some of the homes were really colorful. All were covered with decorative security bars.



After getting away from the major traffic, the city drive was quite interesting. The city has a population of just under 1 million (as of 2010).



Also passed the Castillo de San Felipe de Barajas (Cartagena was ruled by the Spanish for many years and the forts were built to protect their gold shipments from the pirates). I got some pictures of it from across the harbor that I'll share later.



Christmas decorations were everywhere (you can just see the Nativity scene in the distance).





Several homes had these Santas climbing up their walls.



Also passed Las Murallas -considered by many the most impressive city walls in the world. They were constructed at the end of the 16th Century after attack by the "pirate" Sir Francis Drake! That's what I guide said! I had never realized that he was considered a pirate!!





Anyway, we made it through town without incident and followed the coastline quite a ways out of town.







We came into another city -seemed to be much higher income here -at least at first.



Then we turned off the main drag and here's where the fun began!!!!



AOL has decided this is enough pictures for this email, so I'll continue with another one! Don't worry, we only made 5 stops on this 10 day cruise -so I'll try not to write too big of a book this time!!

Love ya,

George & Pamela

Subj: Panama Party #5 -Partial Panama Cruise, Dec 2011

Date: 12/29/2011

Hi Guys,

Ready to continue with our day in Cartagena?

So we turned off that road and into a really dilapidated neighborhood.



That led onto a beach -quite pretty with quite a few young folks playing.



Now keep in mind that we were in a bus! Fairly large regular kind of bus -not 4 wheel drive or anything like that!! So we drove on down the beach for several miles!! Well.....drove is a term that is loosely used to describe motion in a generally forward direction!!!!!!





We passed lots & lots of "restaurants" & "beach resort facilities." According to our guide, this was an area that was mobbed with locals during the weekend. It is a fishing community. Really????





After several miles, we actually made a Y turn and backed into this tiny alley to park the bus! That bus that you see in front was one of the 2 that was on the excursion with us.



We all piled out of the bus and followed the guide to where we were to board the "canoes."





When we reached the "boat dock" there were young dancers performing for us (more pictures when we returned from our float trip!!). Our guide had mentioned that this particular area of Columbia is known for their erotic dancing. She said the families here were quite large, 10 or more kids per family. I quote "this is because they do not have TV."





Now at this point I have to mention that this was a tour that we booked through Princess. They did mention that the canoes would be rustic!!! Wow! Now that's a world that I now have a new definition for!!!!







Once again AOL has limited my pictures. I promise I won't be so long winded on the other stops, but this was soooooo

very interesting, so I'll continue with another email.

More soon!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

Subj: Panama Party #6 -Partial Panama Cruise, Dec 2011
Date: 12/30/2011

Good Afternoon!! So sorry to delay finishing Cartagena! I had it all finished last night, but before I sent it, AOL signed off and I lost the entire package. Very frustrating!! But not to worry! I want you all to see it!!!

So. We loaded into the "rustic" canoes, 4 tourist and the native to propel our canoe by poling. In our canoe, George was in front, then me, then a woman and finally her husband (they were from England). Our "poler" for lack of another term was a bit older -have not a clue as to how old that would be, but definitely older than the other ones there....but that didn't mean he was slow!! No sirree!! We booked right along and he kept us right in the center of all the mangrove tunnels! George & I tried to steer our own canoe through the mangroves in the Everglades (remember that Liz & Jeff???) and we were all over the place, running into roots, having to duck limbs, etc, but not with this guy! He was awesome! Okay, so on with it. First off, we headed across a huge expanse of shallow water open to the ocean.





There were young boys in the water that waded up to us asking for a "dolluh." They were cute, but we didn't give them any money and they didn't pester us.





I saw a crab in the water, but didn't get a picture. I also spotted this Kingfisher.



Then we ducked into the mangroves.



We thought we might see caymons, snakes, spiders, birds, or something!!! But all we saw were this huge termite mounds on the branches and some tiny little fish in the water. And some vultures! That surprised me -I had not thought about buzzards being on beaches or near the ocean, but we saw them at every port this time.





We floated in and out of the mangroves and eventually gathered together for a fishing demonstration. Now would be the time to mention that in between the poling -our boatman had to bail!! The canoe constantly filled with water and we would hear him bailing!!! I never got a picture of it, but I did get a shot of one of the guys bailing our neighbors canoe while we were gathered together. There was a board for us to rest our feet on, so they never got wet, but we'd see the water getting deeper in the bottom of the canoe!!!! Anyway, the fishing demo was wonderful and there were several little boys there to demo the catches.









And before AOL cuts me off, I want to make sure and get some shots of the guys poling the canoes. Check out the lean they use. Several of them were bare footed too.





The canoe float was about 45 minutes, then when we got back to shore, they gave us coconuts to drink and some more dancing!





We walked back to the bus through the really rough looking "homes."



And drove back down the beach. We stayed in the same seats, so we had the other view! It was even rougher!! Still amazing to me that we drove through this in our bus!!!!



Back in town, we stopped for shopping at Las Bovedas (the political Dungeons that have been transformed into an upscale shopping area).



And that's all AOL will let me load!! I have to put just a few more pictures on from here. This was just such a wonderful place!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

Subj: Panama Party #7 -Partial Panama Cruise, Dec 2011

Date: 12/30/2011

Hi Guys -Okay I promise, I'll finishing Cartagena!!! Only a couple more pictures. We went on for a short walk through the Colonial Old Town which is on UNESCO's World Heritage List.







Only a very short stop to see the Cathedral. The view across the harbor was spectacular.





Here's some other views of the Castillo de San Felipe de Barajas from across the Harbor.





Back on the ship, we went up on deck to say goodbye to Cartagena!!





Interesting place to fish!! Last view of Cartagena!!



And the guys played a little ping pong!!



Sorry to be so long winded on this one! I'll try to do better. Except that the next stop is Panama! And of course that's interesting!!!

Anyway, hope you enjoyed it!!!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

Subj: Partial Party #8 -Partial Panama Cruise, Dec 2011

Date: 12/30/2011

Good Morning Everyone!! Thought I'd at least get you started in Panama! It was a wonderful day! Since George & I had gone through it before from San Diego to Ft Lauderdale 4 years ago (remember Liz & Jeff!!!), we slept in a bit. They had been rather hazy about exact times, so I got up at 7am and got straight in the shower. By the time I looked out at 7:30am, we were almost out of the Gaton Lock!!!! Missed the entire transition to the lake! Dan was out on their balcony, so chatted with him while we finished the transition. They called for our group tour about 8:45am and we took off to the theater.







Our ship anchored just outside the Gatun Lock in the lake and we tendered the very short stretch to shore.







We loaded straight onto a bus and headed towards Panama City on the Pacific side of the isthmus (Panama is an isthmus -narrow body of land between 2 larger bodies, our guide said oceans, but I think the real definition is talking about between North and South America). Panama has always been a very important piece of land due to the ease of transport between the Pacific and the Atlantic. It has been fought over for years!!! Anyway our guide gave us lots of info which I promptly forgot. History has never been my best subject!!



The best thing about our guide was the show & tell. She had all kinds of things for us to look at!! Maps, and lists of birds, animals, reptiles, clothes, you name it and she had something for us to hold and look at! It made the hour drive very short! Then we made a quick stop for potty break and shopping. Also changed over to little 25 pax busses to tour the old city. Streets are too small for the big busses. She said UNESCO has given them 4 years to renovate the old city to be placed on the UNESCO list. Also, the city busses are covered in graffiti. She says they even have contests each

month for the best decorated bus!! I guess it gives a focus to the youngsters!!



Many of the buildings in the old city are just facades -basically husks of buildings. She was really pushing for folks to come here and buy buildings to renovate them! She said loans were very easy to get!! And lots of instructions on how to renovate! Interesting in buying into Panama???



Some of the renovations look great! Some still need a lot of work!!!





We stopped for a walk in the center of town. They also have a Las Bovedas (dungeon) area that hasn't been renovated yet!



This Memorial (to the French, but considered International) is at the base of a walled walk that is in the center of Panama City. The view from a top the wall is awesome. Tide was out, so not as pretty as when it's flooded.





Check out the local natives under the table and against the walls. I cheated and took a picture without paying them, but look at the rings around their ankles, calves and wrists. They believe that the extremities are better thin, so they wear these rings around them to prevent them from filling out! Scary!!!



More photos from atop the wall -this time looking towards the Modern Panama City. This skyline is only 6 years old!! It literally did not exist until 6 years ago when the richest of the rich from around the world (like Donald Trump) came to Panama and started building skyscrapers. Most of these are condos. Supposedly you can buy this 2500 square foot apartments for about \$250,000. Again, our guide was really pushing! Want to live in Panama???





Keep in mind that this is the beginning of the dry season and it's 100 percent humidity and about 88 degrees! We were soaked to the skin, just slowly walking over the wall!!! Lots of booths with folks selling stuff. It was really interesting!



We bought some of these hand painted feathers.



I'll continue this later!!! In the meantime -consider buying a home in Panama City! Ha! Reckon we could teach Rounds there??

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

Subj: Panama Party #9 -Partial Panama Cruise, Dec 2011

Date: 1/2/2012

Hello Friends & Family!!!

So here we are still in Panama City, the old town. We loaded back onto our little bus and they served us our "light snack," A roll with one thin slice of some indiscernible meat and either mustard or catsup. Hummm! Oh yes, also a small bottle of water! Pretty poor fare for folks used to eating on the Island Princess!!!! Anyway, it kept us from feeling light headed and we ate while we took a short drive through the Modern Panama City. Craning our necks to look up at the beautiful new skyscrapers. It is a gorgeous skyline and only 6 years old!





There was a central park area all decorated with a mix of Christmas and Nativity animals???





We could see the bridge of the Americas in the distance. Had hoped we would drive over it, but nope! Headed instead to a yacht marina to change back to our big bus.





Back on the big bus, we headed to the Miraflores Visitor's Center of the Pacific locks. Very very interesting!!!! But enroute we saw this tree full of cormarants! Cool!



And past the Canal Headquarters which is built to scale of the locks. With the number of steps matching the elevation gain of the locks from Pacific to Caribbean. Supposed to get to stop and walk around, but one couple had been late back to the bus and put us off schedule!! Grrrrrr!!





Drove all through the Canal Zone and heard about the Panamanian student uprising that initiated the treaty that signed the Canal back to the Panamanians. Saw the housing areas, etc.



Then to the Visitor's Center. First we watched a movie about the construction. I didn't remember that the French had originally started the construction in the 1800's and lost millions of dollars and more than 20,000 lives. That's really sad!! The movie was very well done. From there we went outside. The close up views of the ships going through the locks from the observation deck was great. Loved watching the little mechanical mules (I call them "little", but they are multimillion dollar contraptions!!!)







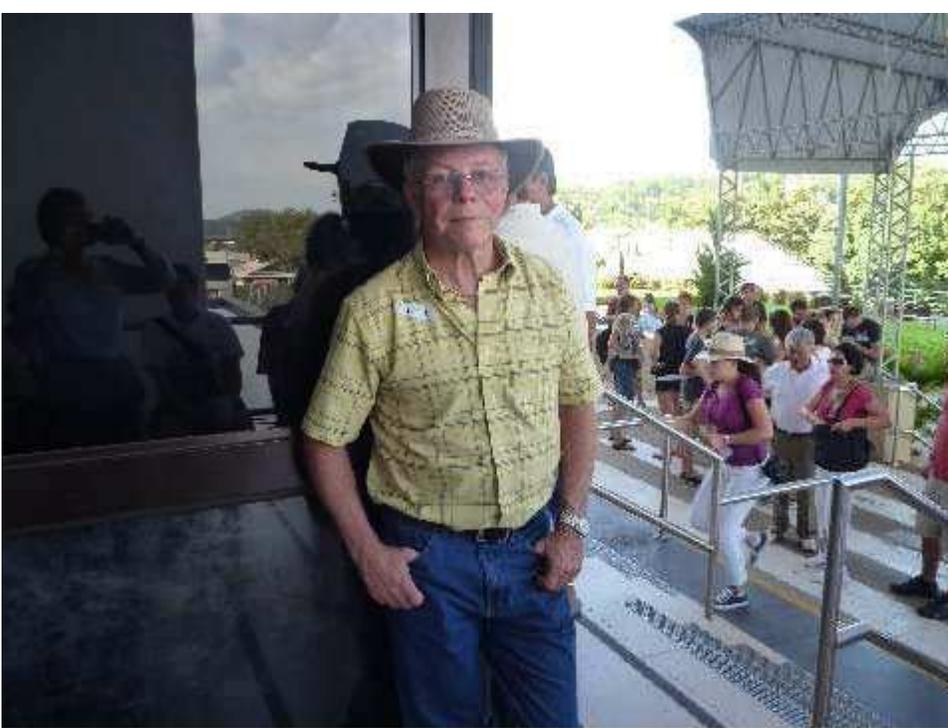
This is looking out to the Pacific ocean portion of the locks.



The Visitor's Center was decorated quite nicely. How's this for a Christmas tree???



We stood outside waiting for our bus to come back & pick us up for the return to the ship. While we were gone, it had went back through Gaton Lock and we met up with it in Colon.



The scenery on the drive back was sooooo green. Very much like a rain forest. Kept an eye out for monkeys, but never saw any. Phooey!!



After getting off the bus at the shopping area outside the dock, we saw a few of the children from our excursion playing with a tiny little monkey (squirrel monkey???) . It was wearing a diaper. Really odd situation, the little boy and his sister were playing with it and suddenly the boy started looking around and asking, "who's monkey is this???" We looked around the crowd and finally saw a young teenage girl hiding behind a post. She said it was her monkey. Not sure why she was leaving it with the young children, but the boy was starting to get worried that he had become the new owner!!! Anyway, the only monkey we got to see in Panama!!



Back on board ship, we saw an exhibition of the Gingerbread houses that they had made on board in a free craft class. Wow!! Some were really really fancy!!!





That evening for supper, our head waiter had made a special appetizer for everyone. It was scrumptious! And they brought me a birthday cake. I especially liked the way they had written Happy Birthday on the plate!!!





The Thai waitress for the next table came & played Happy Birthday to me on her flute!!!



We all sang Christmas carols in the Centrum after supper.



Then they had a special Christmas show in the theatre. Notice the lifelike fireplace on the computer screen next to Santa!!



Wish we had thought to bring things to decorate our door like a neighbor did!!



Princess gave us a little stocking with 2 candy canes with our normal chocolate (and a notice to change our clocks!!!). Sure a step down from the Celebrity cruise through Panama that gave us a really nice garment bag!!!!



It was a wonderful Christmas Eve! Hope it was wonderful for you all also!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

Date: 1/4/2012

Hi Guys,

Christmas Day found us docking in Limon, Costa Rica at 6am!!!! Yipes! Another early morning! We were walking off the ship to our bus at 7:45am. What kind of vacation is this???? We had made it a fairly early evening to get some sleep!!! But the day was mostly sunny and in the mid 70's. Limon is on the Caribbean side of the country. It seemed to be a poorer side of Costa Rica. Our guide said that there were some areas in the country that were quite exclusive "American" and that most of the locals could not afford to visit them, everything there was too expensive for them. The bus was very new and fancy. We left the dock and started driving south along the coast. We passed a small city park and some shopping areas, but since it was early morning on Christmas Day, it was quiet and there were not many folk around.





The coast was on our left and we had sat on the right side, so I didn't have a view of the water. Our side mostly passed lots & lots of green vegetation and brown water.







Made one short stop to get a "fruit" from a local tree that the guide wanted us to recognize. It's used as a dye -she even smeared some of the seeds inside on her cheek to let us see it. Can't think of the name of it now.





Anyway our destination was Aviarios del Caribe Sloth Sanctuary. Took about 45 minutes to get there. It was a great place! Understand that they have a nice website, but I haven't looked it up yet.



So as you can guess, they rescue injured/abandoned sloths and it possible, nurse them to health and return them to the wild. First we saw a movie about the operation. The Sanctuary was originally a B&B. About 20 years ago, someone gave the owner an injured sloth and she took care of it and returned it to the wild. Apparently there is not a lot of info available on care & upkeep for them, so through the years, she has had a large learning curve. Turns out that most veterinary medicine kills them. She has made up her own medicines and care procedures. They have more than 100 sloths - both 2 and 3 toed on the premises. So after the movie, one of the guides took us to the nursery. They would not let us touch them, but she took several out of their cages to let us get a closer look at them.





The funny red color is from the dye of the fruit that they had showed us. It is mixed with other herbs and berries to form a paste to heal mange and other skin maladies. It is very easy to tell the difference in the 3 toed and 2 toed sloths (besides seeing their toes!!!). The cute furry faces are 3 toed and the ones with the bare noses are the 2 toed. Our guide said that all current day sloths have 3 toes for their hind legs, it is only the front legs that have a difference. There are many other differences also (in eating habits, mating habits, etc), but for us, just to see the difference in their faces was very interesting!



They have some older sloths in viewing cages that we got to visit. They said there are some that really seemed to enjoy human interaction and others that can't handle it. They sleep 18 or more hours a day.

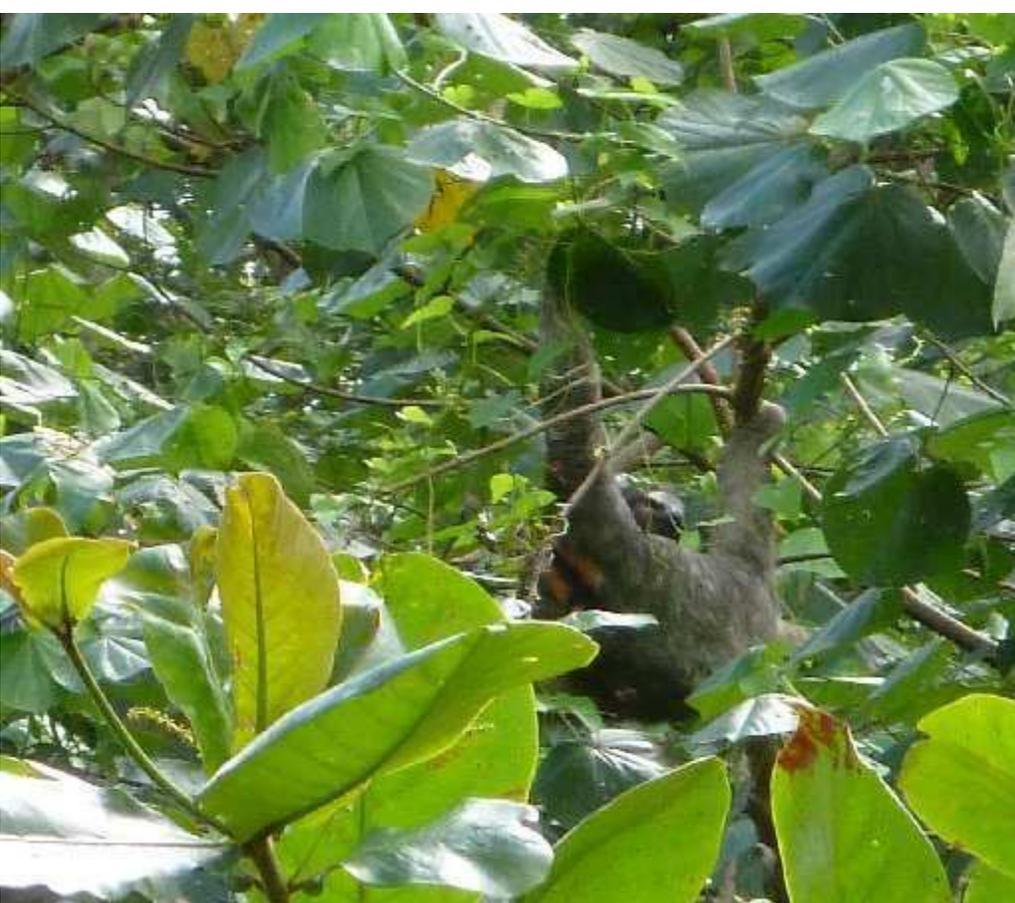






About the only noise they make is when the female is in heat and she makes a shrill screaming sound to call the males. They have a female, (Buttercup -pictures of her later) who's been with them for more than 20 years and she was screaming away while we were there. And the males were coming from miles around -although they don't allow her access to the them. They said that in the wild they would mate until they died. They only raise 1 baby at a time. If they have more than 1, they allow the weaker one to starve to death. We actually saw a wild sloth in the trees outside the viewing area, called there by Buttercup!!!





They certainly all looked sweet & cuddly, but she said they could scratch & bite pretty fiercely. She said that some were pretty darn grumpy and that she had been bitten once that required stitches. But that was once in the 3 years she had worked there. She moved there from Ohio to work at the Sanctuary. So, after watching them for quite a while, we went outside to wait for our canoe ride on the Estrella River. The grounds were beautiful and quite well maintained. They appeared to have lots of volunteer help around the place.



We loaded onto the canoes, 6 per canoe, plus a guide to paddle and describe some of the things we were seeing.



We were hoping to see howler monkeys, but we only heard them. We did see lots of vegetation, including these ornamental bananas.



And both green bamboo (used for building homes)



and yellow bamboo (used for wicker furniture).



We saw several more sloths in the trees over us.



One of the ship's videographers was with us too.



Here's a shot of one of the other canoes just to give you an idea of what they were like.



We took a nice guided walk through the rain forest. Told us that there are 12 different types, based on temperature, humidity, altitude, and water content.



This guide was easy to understand and obviously loved his job!!



Then before we left, we were served some fresh fruit and cold water. And we got to meet Buttercup! She was really a special lady! You could tell she wanted to visit with all of us! Never got to feel their fur though. Wish we could have!!



Shortly we headed back to the ship. It was a formal night, so we changed quickly and headed to dinner! After our not to be missed Happy Hour in the Schneider's room of course. Dinner was very special tonight and we got a picture of our entire dining room staff. The young Thai girl really wasn't part of our staff, but she adopted us anyway! We were treated really really special! There was a wonderful Christmas Citrus Cello served as an after dinner liquor! It was Yummy!!









After dinner we saw our 2nd full production show! It was fabulous! Called Motor City and it was Disco at it's finest! Sure do love the theatre!! The orchestra and the dancers on this cruise were just awesome!!!



And Christmas was over!!! Soooooo very sad! A beautiful day! Hope you enjoyed it with us!!!

Only one more stop on this cruise! And that was by far the most exciting!! Coming soon! Our Grand Finalee!!!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

Subj: Panama Party #11 -Partial Panama Cruise, Dec 2011

Date: 1/6/2012

Hello Everyone,

Although we've now been back in Mesa for a week, I really want to share our last couple of days on the cruise. They were wonderful!! The day after Limon was at sea. The waves were rather rough, actually overall, this cruise was fairly rough. Especially compared to the past couple of years when it was almost like bath water! But didn't keep us from enjoying another Wine Tasting and the Captain's Cocktail Party.



It was a nice relaxing day and prepared us for the excitement of Ocho Rios!!! We got up at 8:15am and again had breakfast delivered to the room. Room service on this cruise was very reliable and the

breakfasts were quite tasty! We watch our ship dock and prepared for our 10am excursion.



It was a nice walk down the dock walkway and the Island Princess looked really pretty tied up there.



It was 80 degrees and cloudy off and on. Felt great! We boarded a small shuttle bus and it took off immediately on the 10 minute drive for Dolphin Cove. We were assigned an 11:30 swim with the Dolphins and had an hour and a half to investigate the rest of the resort.



George & Sandi flirted with the local Pirate!! We took advantage of a cute little photo op with some well trained parrots and macaws.











Moved on to see a couple of goats and another photo op with a boa and an iguana, but we passed on that one!!



We made our way on to the boardwalk area that contained shops, a dolphin pen, mantra ray pen, & shark pen. It looked out onto the ocean and had a man made beach that was quite pretty. You could rent seakayaks too. We considered that, but decided we didn't have enough time.







We just had time to see a show in the shark area before we went to the main event -swimming with the dolphins!!! The shark show was rather hokey, lots of stupid jokes that we couldn't hear very well over their microphones, but eventually the guys got in the water with the Nurse Sharks and did a few tricks with them. Mostly had them roll over on their backs and seemed to go to sleep.





Then it was time to go to the other side where we were to have our dolphin swim. We could take pictures while we suited up, but once we got in the water, the only cameras allowed were their professionals. I got a few shots as we got ready!

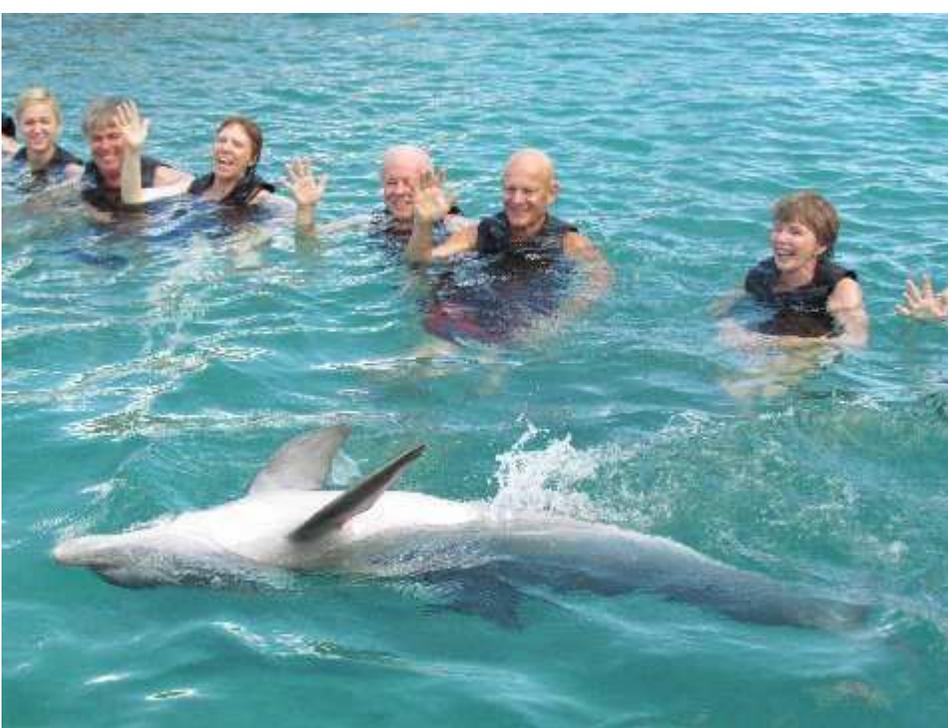




We had an adorable girl guide and she gave us instructions on how to swim across to where our dolphin Alex would join us. There were 10 folks in our group. Have no idea how deep the water was, we could not touch or see the bottom (water was a little cloudy, but not much). First we lined up facing the dock and Alex did tricks for us.







For each of the tricks, she had us do something different. Wave our hands, turn around in the water, clap. I doubt that we were really having any effect on the dolphin, but it was enormous fun and it certainly felt like we were interacting with it. Then she told us to have our arms straight in front of us. Alex swam by in front of us so that we could all touch her. She did that several times. Her skin felt like velvet. Wish we could use her skin softener!!!



Now it was time for the ride. She had us get in single file -Sandi was told to be first in line and to hold her hands out in front of her and then slap the water. Alex swam directly to her and up so that her belly was facing Sandi. Then she basically stood on her tail until Sandi reached out and grabbed her pectoral fins. Then she arched her back and swam upside down, taking Sandi for a ride, belly to belly! It was absolutely magnificent!!!! We all got to do the same thing. Most exciting thing I've ever done, next to swimming with the sharks and flying in the F15E in the military!!!



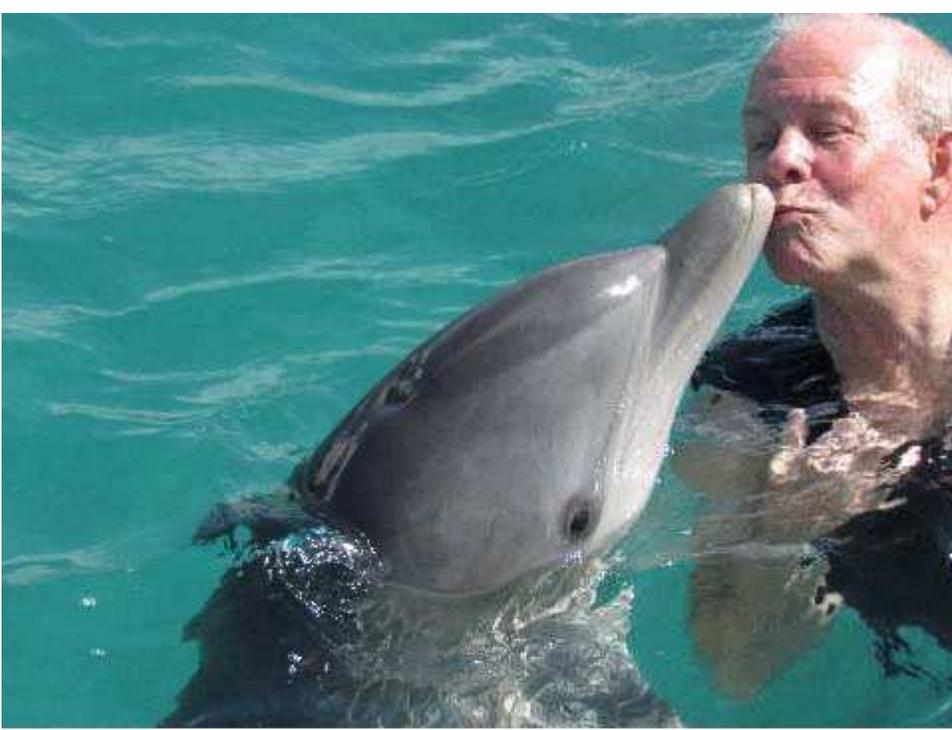




And we weren't finished!! Then she had us line up along the dock and swim out one by one about where we were before! Now Alex swam out to us, touched our cheek with the tip of her snout and we were to push against her, then she came back and gave us a kiss!!! So very very sweet! I think she got a little confused about where the bald guys cheeks were!! No hairline to orient her!!





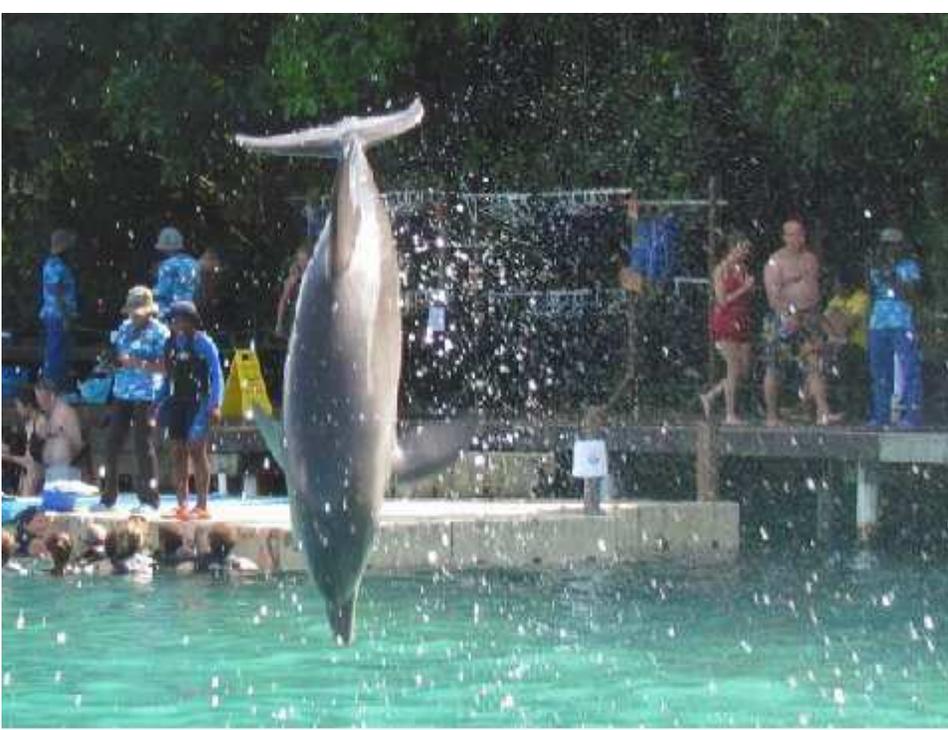






There were 2 more tricks, George got to toss a ring and she swam out hooked it and brought it back to us and then she and all the other dolphins did a jumping show for us while we were still in the water with them. Tremendous! All in all, about 45 minutes in the water with the dolphins. Absolutely awesome!!!!





We hung around for another half hour waiting for our DVD to be prepared and watched the Dolphins on the first side doing some jumping shows.





Then we hopped back on the shuttle bus and headed to Dunn's River Falls. I'll do that one in a separate email since for some reason AOL has allowed me to put so many pictures in this one -it's probably a huge email!!! Hang on for the last adventure!!!

Lots of love,

George & Pamela

Date: 1/6/2012

Hi Guys -This is it, the final chapter of this fantastic vacation! And what an ending it was! Really happy that we had this day last! Can't imagine if we had started with this! Would have been anti climatic!! Anyway, the little shuttle bus took us just about 5 minutes down the road to Dunn's River Falls. This is an entire resort area completed to take advantage of the beautiful Dunn's River Falls. This area has been a tourist attraction for many many years. It's been the site of several movies, including Tom Cruise's Cocktail (1988) and the 1st James Bond -Dr No (1962). Geologists consider it a "living phenomena" because calcium deposits keep rebuilding it. It is one of the only waterfalls in the world that empty's directly into the sea. Hand holds and stairs have been built along the edges to allow folks to climb up through it. It is a 600' climb from the beach to the top. Each group of tourist are assigned a guide that climbs with you. You are encouraged to hold hands all the way up to the top. I had George behind me and a sweet young English girl in front of me. Then Sandi and Dan. Dan was helping a young Indian girl through most of the climb. Here's a wide angle picture that I got from the internet.



You were allowed to take your camera and since my was for underwater, I had no problem taking it.

However -we had to

leave everything in lockers at the entrance and only had swimsuits on -no pockets. I had my camera on my wrist and went to take my first picture from the water -looking down at the beach below and my battery died! Couldn't believe it! Therefore, we once again bought the pictures from the "professional" that followed us. He didn't do a very good job, actually no still pictures, I had to use the video and

capture frames and they all have the quality marking on them. But it will give you an idea of how fantastic the trip was! Very very exciting! A guess a bit dangerous considering we were to teach a dance weekend in a couple days time! But luckily we didn't hurt anything (although Dan did stub his toe and got a knot on his shin.) So....first entering the park -looked like a Disney World or something when we first walked in. Very touristy! We were assigned a guide and he took us to an overlook and then to lockers to leave all our clothes and extra stuff (for a fee of course!).











Then on down to the beach to start the climb back up from sea level.



Most of the climb was single file side by side along the left edge. There were other folks that appeared to either be on their own or their guides were not keeping them in such strict control, they cut through our line sometimes.



The photographer would run ahead of us and get us coming towards him. Although it looks pretty dangerous, there were usually fairly good foot holds and we were all wearing water shoes. There was not any algae on the rocks, they must keep it cleaned off or the water is running so quickly it cannot grow. The water was cool, but since it was in the 80's, it felt very good.



There were many small lagoons that we stopped in (for more pictures of course) and to rest a little.



The photographer (he was adorable by the way) would constantly yell for us to say "Ya man." And of course we all did!!



Most of the time we were slogging through a few inches to several foot of rushing water. Sometimes it was a bit difficult to stand up! Hence the hand holds along the edge.



Occasionally we'd stop for a look at what was ahead!



Once we had to duck under a bridge.





Another little lagoon stop.



There was a place that had a "slide." We all had a go at that! Great fun!





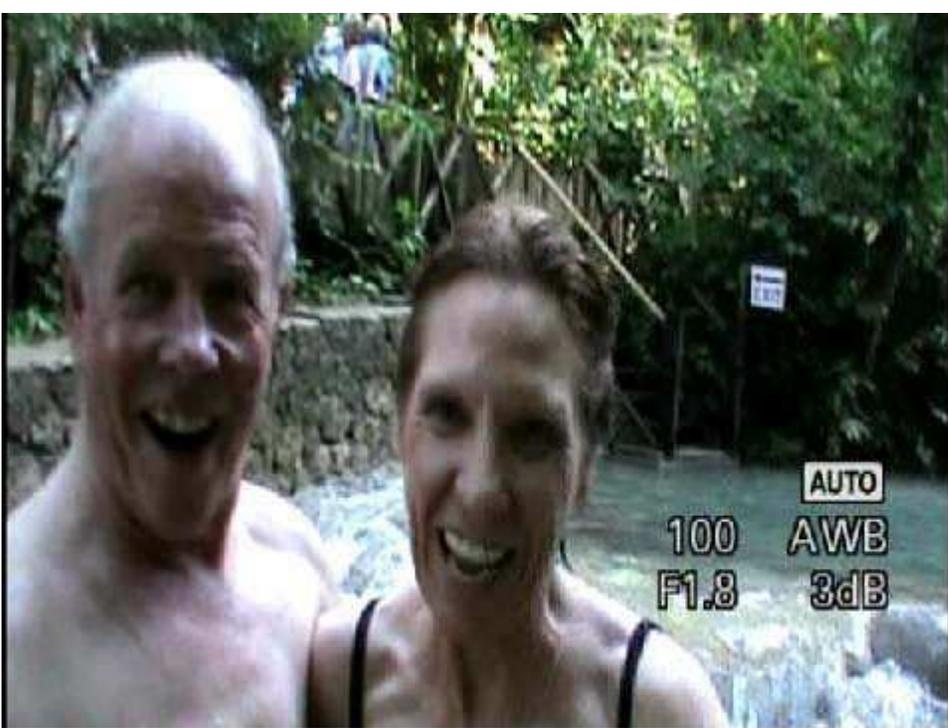
Sandi & I danced a little Celebratory Ya Man dance for the photographer! Another glance up!





And the final excitement for the climb was a deep pool that they had us fall backwards into. He had George & I do it together. Yippee!!!





We finished up at the top, mostly still hand in hand!



And then it was over! We collected our clothes and wandered through the shopping area in search of a refreshing Jamaican beer! We were not disappointed either!







And that was the end of Jamaica! The all aboard was supposed to be 3:30pm and we were in line on the ramp at 3:30pm. By the time we got to our cabins, the ship was moving! Goodbye Jamaica!!!



Our last day was at sea and finally we got totally calm seas (other than one strange squall that lasted about 20 minutes and then things were right back to calm!!!).



And so ended out Partial Panama cruise! It was fantastic! Thoroughly recommend it! Of course we had to spend our last day packing and getting organized for an early morning departure. But we still had one more fabulous evening meal!!! Yes, Billmar -more ground pepper!!!! It was American night and they served Baked Alaska for dessert.





Dan & Sandi danced to their favorite band, Epithani one more time!



And we danced to Tempo Quatro again too!



We always like to carry our own luggage off the ship, so we had to get up at 5:15am to be walking off at 7:20. It was a beautiful morning in Fort Lauderdale -geez we were seeing a real sunrise!!! Ick!! You notice that we are even at the exact same dock where we started!!



Worked like clockwork. Had booked an American flight out of Miami because it was an earlier connection than we could get out of Ft Lauderdale. We were lucky, no traffic and the taxi got us there in 31 minutes (cost \$70 too!). Easy flight to Tampa and Curt was waiting to take us to the home where we were to stay with dancers (Tom & Rita Flannigan). It was funny because they were not there -hadn't returned from their Christmas visit to kids up in New York! Curt had the key and we used their van to run get a good ole fattening junk food hamburger. They got home the next afternoon and we got to use their resort ballroom to practice before they arrived! Had an evening to visit with them and then worked the New Year's Weekend with Curt & Tammy! Had a ball!!! Here's a nice picture of Onie (& Garry of course), the designer of my Bling Britches! Is she marvelous or what!!!!



And here's the whole group dancing our new cha!!! I Want You Back!!!

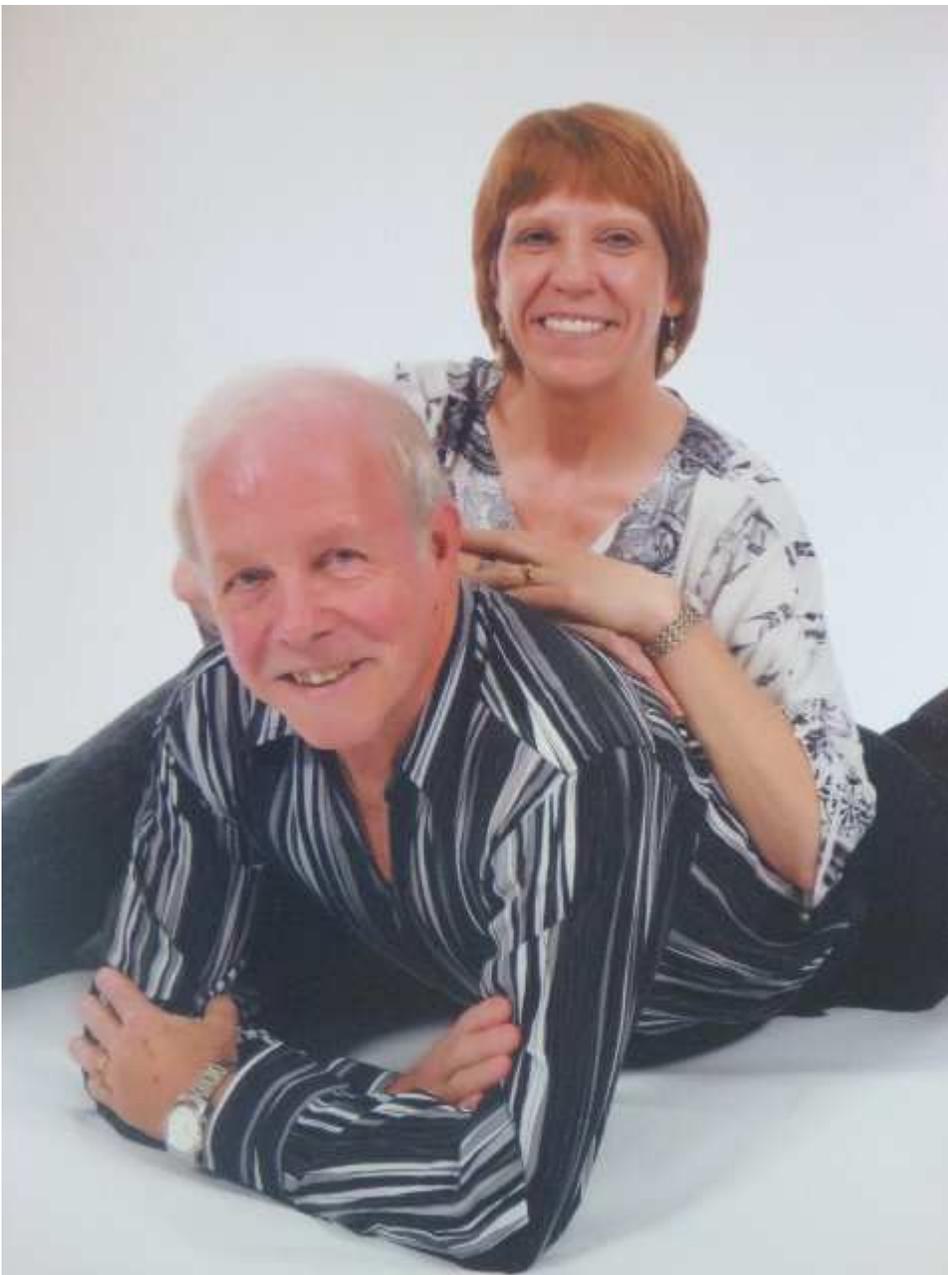




Ooohh! Almost forgot, just wanted to share a couple of pictures that the ship photographers took!!







And now we're back in Mesa for our Jan -Mar Mesa Season! It's lovely! Already planning our next trip! Australia and Japan in May/June! More to come!!

Happy New Year & keep in touch!!!

Lots of love,



George & Pamela