



The Journey Begins

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If you are a past reader of our articles, you know that we take our vacation in the summer; this is when we can get away to some tropical paradise and let all our cares drift off in the salt air. This summer we decided to do it “in style” we booked our vacation on a 160,000 ton luxury “voyager class” ocean liner aptly named “Freedom of the Seas.” She stands 14 stories high and 1200 feet long and can cruise the open ocean at 21.5 knots (mph) while her 4800 plus passengers and 1500 crew members barely know they are on her decks. Freedom is rated #1 by Cruise magazine and other Travel magazines as the #1 cruise ship in the world and after spending 7 days on her, I can see why. She has an exterior that resembles the Starship Enterprise with the round green glass windows on her topside and plenty of green glass along her port (left) and starboard (right) sides. Built in Finland, Freedom was christened by Godmother Katherine Louise Calder in June 2006 and is home ported in Port Canaveral, Florida.

We arrived at Port Canaveral, Florida on Sunday afternoon and boarded our luxury cruise around 1400 (2 PM). At 1700 (5PM), we headed topside for the shove-off and waited on our tugboats to push us out into the beautiful blue Atlantic Ocean. As we sipped a Miami Vice cocktail and mingled with our new cruising friends, we all waved goodbye to Port Canaveral and looked forward to a fun

and exciting time aboard.

Freedom is the definition of luxury; in the 3 dining rooms the meals are absolutely amazing. Imagine being able to sit at a table and watch the clear blue water of the Atlantic go by right below you 5 stories down. I cannot put into words how that felt for me, more less my gorgeous wife. The menu is 5 Star, the food is absolutely delicious and the service is way above par. The Chefs are the best there are and they prove it to you every single night. One night we had lamb, another duck, another filet mignon, surf and turf, prime rib. Every night we sat at a table of luxury over the ocean and were treated like royalty, it was amazing.

Freedom has some of the best water sports of any cruise liner, so the kids are kept busy as little bees and the adults can relax knowing their children are on board and safe. The pool area comprises most of deck 11. For the younger children there is the H2O Zone a maze of low depth swimming pools with many hoops and shapes that squirt water through small holes on passer-bys. The children were having a ball in this area daily, it is like a McDonalds playground compounded 3-fold and semi-submerged with water and lots of pumps; amazing fun in the sun for the little ones. Parents could relax and watch their loved ones enjoy themselves in a safe and fun atmosphere. On the other side of the H2O zone is a bigger kids play

area with hot-tubs and deeper pools of water. The teens had a ball here daily swimming and just conversing with others while enjoying the Caribbean sun. Last but not least separated by the Solarium bar was the adult swimming area complete with a bridge that spanned the pool, the swimming area came with its own permanent bar mounted in the water under the bridge (out of the sun). We spent some time on the bar stools on this trip, met some nice people and had some fun conversation. On each side of the pool are adult hot tubs that sit directly over the ocean. WOW!

On Deck 12 just above the large pool area is the fitness level complete with a full walking/running track around the top of the ship, a fitness center that would rival the Summit's and a day spa with plenty of "upper crust" affordable treatments. On Deck 13 comprising about half the back (aft) of the ship is a rock climbing wall, basketball courts, putt-putt [golf] course and the FlowRider. The FlowRider is a swimming pool of water that pumps 30,000 GPM (gallons per minute) of water over a smooth hilly surface creating waves and surf like conditions. It is mounted on the aft (back) of the boat on the 12th level. It is an amazing show of force, surfers stand on small boards and try to master the art of keeping themselves upright, while riding the power of the surf, once they lose control the mighty FlowRider flips them on their backside and deposits them up on top. It is surely a sight to see while underway on the open ocean. The kids as well as adults loved this monster and spent hours daily trying to master it. If you like water sports such as knee/wake/snowboarding, surfing or skiing, you will love the FlowRider. Because of its popularity, Royal Caribbean is adding a FlowRider to all their ships.

On the Deck 5 sits the Promenade; a brick road area surrounded on both sides by 7 stories of tall windows of staterooms on port and starboard sides and plenty of shops and bars along the way. This is the area where the crew performed many events for us such as: Remembering the 70's where they dressed as Free-Birds

and the Village People and sang many songs from that era, performed acrobatic acts such as Cirque De Soleil and had a full circus parade (with human dressed animals). Every night at 1900 there was something fun and exciting going on at the Promenade. There is also a 2 theaters where there were Broadway plays, shows, comedians, musicals and many more fun shows to attend. On Deck 4 there was the Casino and a full ice skating rink where we watched a professional ice show with well known dancers and performers. It was an amazing thing to watch on board a ship. They opened up the ice rink for free skating. Also there are plenty of bars, clubs and fun events going on everyday at anytime throughout the ship. For the little ones, they had Aqua-Nuts, a fun and exciting club that kept them busy doing all sorts of fun activities throughout the day. The teens had dancing, an arcade, Johnny Rockets (hamburger joint), and many other activities



that kept them busy throughout the cruise. The crew did an amazing job of keeping all guests busy from the little ones to the not so little ones. Royal Caribbean advertises their boats as Family Friendly and does a very good job of proving it.

On Deck 14 overlooking the ocean is a cool card room appropriately named Cloud Nine, this is where the bridge, canasta, rummy players gathered daily for fun card games. There is also Oliver and Twist, a nice martini bar complete with piano. Portofino (Italian) and Chops Grille (Steak) restaurants were also up there with huge window views for patrons. On Deck 9 there is an internet computer room where you can keep in touch with work or home. On deck 8 there is nice quiet library complete with plenty of books and couches for you to lounge on after a long day in the hot Caribbean sun. I sat up there and read my new book "Lone Survivor" by Marcus Luttrell a US Navy Seal who survived a devastating battle in Afghanistan, only to be saved by a village of caring people. A true American hero and patriot, I suggest every American give this book a read.

Our first port of call directly 100 miles SE of Canav-

eral was Coco Cay in the Bahamas. A beautiful little island owned by Royal Caribbean that only serves their customers. They have jet skis, parasailing, snorkeling, scuba diving, swimming in crystal clear blue water and white sand. Coco cay is paradise to many and it has the feel of a Corona Beer island; the kind you would see on one of their commercials. At 1700 the captain blew the whistle and away we sailed south down the mighty Atlantic towards St Thomas in the Virgin Islands. Cruising at 21.5 knots we were underway for 1 ½ days, our expected time of arrival in St Thomas was Wednesday at 0700. St Thomas is a beautiful hilly tropical island located down in the chain of islands known as the Virgin Islands. It is a US territory, it boasts Megan's Bay one of the top 10 beaches in the world (it is absolutely gorgeous). They drive on the other side of the road and the tour drivers are worse than "New York" cabbies, good thing the horn works! After spending the day on St Thomas shopping and being a tourist, it was time to board the ship and head for St Martin. St Martin or Maarten is a neat little island that is Dutch on one side and French on the other. At this point you are in another country. We took a nice tour of the island and had some fun on

the French side. Everyone speaks English, so you do not need to brush up on your foreign language skills. On Thursday afternoon we boarded our Starship for the 1300 nautical mile trip back to Florida. We would now be underway for 2 ½ days and this is when you really get to take advantage of all this ship has to offer. Once again the crew does an amazing job of keeping everyone busy. After 2842 nautical miles, on Sunday morning at 0700 we pulled back into Port Canaveral, Florida and headed off this amazing vessel, back into our normal lives relishing the fact that we were able to experience her for all she was worth.

If you want to get a good picture of what Freedom is like, all you have to do is vision a luxury floating Las Vegas casino such as Paris with its promenade and atriums and you have a nice picture of what she has in store for you. Freedom of the Seas is an amazing ship and I can't wait for next year so I can once again make my acquaintance with her or one of her sister ships. We hope you get to experience the luxury and beauty of these amazing ships someday. Thank You Royal Caribbean, we will be back to sail with you again!

