

Second Panama Canal Trip

After some consideration, we decided to take another Panama Canal trip. Our first one was with Dennis and Tricia on the last non-smoking [Carnival Paradise](#) trip in September 2004 from Miami to Long Beach. This time we went with Dennis and left from San Pedro on the [Coral Princess](#) on November 17, 2024 and went to Port Everglades in Florida. This trip was listed at \$1439 per person for a balcony cabin. The ship had a very nice glass ceiling area with a pool and two hot tubs behind the openair pool/hot tub area. The cruise took 16 days and we then spent 4 days exploring the port vicinity and then flew back from FLL to LAX on Jet Blue.

For this cruise, we opted for adjacent balcony cabins on Deck 9 Port-side Forward. The cabin attendant opened the door between the two balconies for us. Dennis got a good heavy-duty motorized wheelchair and was able to move around readily and with some speed. Lou started the trip with some clot in the left leg, but that did not impede movement. Then one morning, the right leg had a problem under the knee that felt like a muscle cramp and that made the right leg not usable for moving through the ship hallways. He was confined to a wheelchair aboard the ship for the next 8 days. Chris got stuck pushing Lou around everywhere on the ship: to the buffet, to dinner, to the shows, to the shore excursions. She did not complain about the extra effort required. After that, Lou was able to slowly walk around again.

Pacific Coast of Mexico: The first stop was Puerto Vallarta which was a late replacement for Manzanillo. The much larger [Discovery Princess](#) was adjacent in the port. There was a holiday parade in the city with many exhibits and costumes, so this was a good day to be there. Chris (walking) and Dennis (riding) explored the city and got some nice colorful iguana shirts. Next was [Huatulco](#) which had one small dock. This stop looked more like a really nice small resort rather than a port. There was a nice beach with a paved walkway/good shopping, and a rocky snorkeling area along the shore. Chris came back with a new orange bikini and some colorful t-shirts. Next was [Puerto Chiapas](#) which was a replacement for San Juan del Sur in Nicaragua. We wanted to stop in Nicaragua (a new country for us), but previous cruises that attempted to tender to shore there were frequently cancelled due to waves/weather. Puerto Chiapas looked like a newly developed port that was well protected against the ocean. The cruise line provided a ten-dollar 30-minute shuttle to the nearby city of [Tapachula](#), which certainly welcomed tourists to town with friendliness, exhibits and performances at the museum. There are many educational institutions near that area.

Puntarenas, Costa Rica: This port was the only same stop as on our previous trip. Last time Louis stayed on ship, while the others went on a local raft trip. This time Chris and Dennis explored the town, but the [aquarium](#) was closed on Monday, which happened to be the day that we were visiting. This port is peninsula within a protected gulf. There is one dock going out into the shallow water and a road connection to the mainland. Many pelican looking birds were diving into the water next to the ship.

Fuerte Amador, Panama: This port is a long causeway from the capital of Panama City which has a surprising number of high-rise buildings. We opted for the ship tour with a bus ride from the dock to the train station for a train ride with classic cars from the 1930s across the canal area to the port of Colon on the Caribbean. The rail trip showed the density of the jungle in Panama. The bus waiting for us there then visited the new Agua Clara locks and went across the new [Atlantic Bridge](#) before returning to the ship. So, we therefore will have crossed the canal zone via rail, bus, and ship, all within 2 days.

Panama Canal Crossing: The next day at 6 AM local time, we started the canal crossing. It was only supposed to take eight hours. The ship went out into the ocean and passed all the waiting ships, about 50 were in sight; there could have been more. The ship then proceeded to the canal entrance.

Bridge of the Americas (near the Pacific coast Panama Canal entrance): the clearance under the main span is 61.3 m (201 ft) at high tide. Ships must cross under this bridge when traversing the Panama Canal, and are therefore subject to this height restriction. The height listed for the Coral Princess is 203 ft. There is about a 3.2 meter variance between high and low tides at this location. This bridge (built from 1959-1962) also has supports in the water that are adjacent to the travel channel and a rusty dock under the bridge that is partially next to the waterway. Several newer, larger passenger ships are too tall to pass under this bridge. There are some plans to convert this bridge into a tunnel.

Our ship was built in 2002 in the Panamax size which is compatible with the old locks, so Princess did not have to pay for the more expensive and less entertaining new larger locks. The ship passed through the Miraflores and Pedro Miguel locks before merging with the larger and deeper new canal waterway leading into the Gatun Lake at the top of the canal. The largest excavation for the canal is the Culebra cut and that is where the Centennial Bridge (2004) crosses the canal with a clearance of 80 meters. When ship approached the three Gatun Locks at the end of the lake, we noticed that the end of the long dock leading to the first lock had been severely damaged: about 20 meters of the dock had been crushed by a previous container ship that had hit the dock probably due to the wind at the time. Our ship passed through the old locks 5 days later with a six-hour delay in the passage. Finally, the long Atlantic Bridge (2019) crosses the waterway just outside of Colon with a clearance of 75 meters

Aruba: In 2004, the Carnival Paradise was supposed to stop here but the visit was cancelled due to hurricane delay. Lou was surprised by the large size of the hotels around the island on the beach. Chris and Lou found a taxi at the dock and went looking for a good snorkeling beach. The taxi driver recommended Arashi Beach for calm, warm water and good fish viewing. Lou sat at the restaurant while Chris explored the water. We took the yellow local bus back to near the dock and went by the usual series of local souvenir stands. General information:

Fort Lauderdale, Florida: The ship ends the trip at the Princess dedicated dock in Port Everglades. We arranged for a four-day stay at the nearby Hollywood, Florida beach. We rented a car at the airport and visited the local attractions of Lion Country Safari, Everglades Airboat rides with its alligator demonstration, and Fort Lauderdale waterway tourist boat. We were there on the Saturday night (December 7, 2024) where there was a local event, the Hollywood Broadwalk Candy Cane Parade, which was held on the 9-meter wide brick paver road adjacent to the beach, where bicycles, walking, and any form of wheeled transport work. One week later there is the Fort Lauderdale Winterfest Boat Parade with its very expensive decorated yachts.