



CELEBRITY SOLSTICE

June 13–20, 2010

Comments are by CruiseCritic.com members & friends collected by 'DarryDFL' & 'PegEggFL'.

Click on blue, underlined text to go to its linked reference.



- [Boarding](#)
- [Cabin](#)
- [Cabin Bathroom](#)
- [Connection Party](#)
- [Customs](#)
- [Departure](#), Ship's
- [Dining](#)
- [Discounts](#)
- [Disembarking](#)

- [Drinks](#)
- [Elevators](#)
- [Laptop](#)
- [Lifeboat Drill](#)
- [Luggage](#)
- [Marano's](#) Restaurant
- [Money](#)
- [Motel](#)

- [News](#), World
- [Pools](#)
- [Rental Car](#)
- [San Juan](#), PR
- [St Maarten](#)
- [St Thomas](#), VI
- [Websites](#)



SCHEDULE				
Date/Time	Location	Activity	Arrive	Depart
Sun, Jun 13	Port Lauderdale, FL	Boarding	—	4:30 PM
Mon, Jun 14	@ Sea	—	—	—
Tue, Jun 15	San Juan, Puerto Rico	Docked	2 PM	10 PM
Wed, Jun 16	Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, VI	Docked	8 AM	6 PM
Thu, Jun 17	Philipsburg, St. Maarten	Docked	8 AM	6 PM
Fri, Jun 18	@ Sea	—	—	—
Sat, Jun 19	@ Sea	—	—	—
Sun, Jun 20	Port Lauderdale, FL	Docked	7 AM	

We were the only ship in port at all 3 ports!

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BOARDING

- DarryDFL, June 13, 2010: Once you pass customs and enter into the Solstice waiting area, there is a great kids play area for kids under 5 years of age. It has tunnels, climbing netting, and a slide. What a great idea.
- DarryDFL, June 13, 2010: Today, the first boarding of ship was 2 PM (not the anticipated 11 AM) because the arriving ship could not disembark due to problems with U.S. Customs computer problems. In addition, the Solstice ID Photo scanners (for the SeaPass) had problems.

CABINS

- Cruising Grandma, May 26, 2010: We have inside stateroom for Solstice, unless we decide to upgrade to a balcony. There are still many cabins available. Since we want to explore all the ship, we won't be in the stateroom except to sleep, shower and change clothes.
- DarryDFL, June 7, 2010: We have an inside cabin too. The money we save, over any other cabin, is applied to our next cruise.

CABIN BATHROOM

- DarryDFL, June 13, 2010, **Toilet**: The inside cabin's bathroom (Deck 9) is larger than on other ships; but, the toilet is stuck in a corner between the shower and the sink, so you'll find using a public bathroom is much easier if you need to sit upon it — unless you're a contortionist.
- DarryDFL, June 20, 2010, **Shower**: The shower is large; but, unlike Royal Caribbean Lines showers, there is no clothes line in the shower. Thus, one cannot use clothes pins to hang wet swimsuits.

CONNECTION PARTY

You may register for a Celebrity Cruises/CruiseCritic Party by going to <http://www.celebrity.com/cruise critic/GetBooking.do> .

You must have a cruise reservation in order to reserve your CruiseCritic Connection Party. The closer to 25 guests, the closer you'll be to meeting your new friends during a complimentary onboard party.

As of 02 June 2010, 69 guests have already signed up for the Celebrity Cruises/Cruise Critic Party for the cruise Celebrity Solstice sailing on 13 June 2010.

- Cheryl20772, May 26, 2010: Late last night, I checked the prices. There was a \$100-per-person price drop for Senior and Resident discounted Aqua-Class tickets. I had to wait till morning to call our TA. When they called Celebrity, our reservation already has enough discounts on it, and we cant have anymore. No price drop for us. Check your price and try.
- SeaBlu, May 26, 2010: You cannot layer discounts. For instance, if you are receiving a Military discount, you cannot also receive the senior discount.
- Cheryl20772, May 29, 2010: The Celebrity stateroom resident rate is \$2098 for AQ. This is \$200 less than it was. If you haven't yet, check prices for your cabin, and see what your current rate is. Some have been able to get On-board Credit adjustments for the difference. Just go to the Celebrity website < <http://celebritycruises.com> > and pretend to book a new cabin for this cruise. See what people are paying for the same class room now.
- DarryDFL, June 22, 2010: The Connection Party was held on Sunday (Day 2) at 10:30 AM. It was held in an open bar with a Trivia Contest immediately following it, so getting acquainted was impossible. It was hosted by the Cruise Director Paul, but he was obviously not too familiar with CruiseCritic as he mentioned that and stated he understood that "some" people use aliases on it when we know everyone does. Paul spent 6 minutes telling us what we would like about the ship. If he had simply said, "Let's go around the room. Tell us your CruiseCritic name and what you like about the ship so far," we would have told him what's really working for him — not what his public relations people say *should* be appealing. Only three of us had name tags at the Connections Party.
- DarryDFL, June 23, 2010: There was no informal meeting because too few members listed their cabin numbers on the roster and there were so many activities.

CUSTOMS

- DarryDFL, June 13, 2010: The delay in boarding was due partly to Customs. (See [Boarding](#).) However, the usual delays with guys having to unload their pockets and people trying to be funny. Guy, either empty your pockets into your wife's purse, carry a fanny pack or carry a one-gallon freezer bag

(like I do). Empty your pockets *before* you get into the scanner line. Customs is not the place to try your new comedy routine. These officers are serious — as they must be to protect you.

DEPARTURE

► DarryDFL, June 13, 2010: The ship departed at precisely 4:30 PM — as scheduled.

DINING

- Cruising Grandma, May 26, 2010: Were doing early dining.
- SeaBlu, May 26, 2010: The 4 of us are doing the late dining in Blu. On Wednesday, we are dining in Tuscan (all 4 of us). On Thursday, we are dining in Murano, just the 2 of us because they will not allow the children.
- Cheryl20772, May 27, 2010: Were up in the hoidy toidy AQ with Seablu. Anyone else with us?
- Javanaut, May 26, 2010: We have late dinner and will be having a martini in the martini bar prior to dinner if any one wants to join us.
- Cruising Grandma, May 26, 2010: No Blu or Aqua class for us. We will dine in the main dining room and a couple of nights in the specialty restaurants. We normally have late seating, but have decided to try early for this cruise. We are Elite and will be having pre-dinner drinks in Michael's Club.
- Javanaut, May 27, 2010: We are Select. We should join the Elite after our Alaska cruise in July/August. So we have to buy our own before dinner drinks.
- SeaBlu, May 27, 2010: We will be having a before dinner drink in the Martini Bar before our late dinner also. We are dining in Blu but still would not miss our "tradition" of the Martini Bar. I assume there is not a problem with our grandchildren sitting with us and just having a soda or a Shirley Temple, etc.
- DarryDFL, May 27, 2010: PegEgg (CC: PegEggFL) & I do early dining.
- DarryDFL, June 13, 2010: The waiter's and the assistant waiter's names are not on the table like Royal Caribbean Lines. This makes it difficult to remember their names. For example, our waiter was Lazaro (a superior waiter), but we had to ask him twice to pronounce it — and we wrote it down — so that we could remember it.
- DarryDFL, June 20, 2010: Formal dining takes one hour & 45 minutes. It's a leisurely pace giving one plenty of time to digest the courses as they are

presented. Since the first sitting is 6 PM and the second is 8:30 PM, it leaves about 30 minutes for the staff to clear the tables of the first sitting and prepare for the second. So don't be late.

► DarryDFL, June 20, 2010: Unlike other ships, most of the tables sit 2–4 people. Two person tables are arranged in such a way that if you want, you can converse with the two people to your left or right — or pretend they are not there.

► DarryDFL, June 20, 2010: 600 of the 1240 crew members are on the food and beverage team.

► DarryDFL, June 15, 2010: The buffet in the dining hall, on the third day, is world-class and is not to be missed. We'll post photos later.

DISCOUNTS

► SeaBlu, May 12, 2010: There is a Resident Rate. I called and got the discount as an Onboard Credit (OBC). At least one guest must be resident of AZ, CA, GA, IL, IN, KS, MA, MD, NC, NJ, NV, NY, OH, PA, RI, TN, WA

► SeaBlu, May 12, 2010: Booked myself, so I just go online and act like I am booking like a new passenger the exact type of booking I already have. When it now offered the Resident Rate and \$200 less per stateroom, I called Celebrity and asked if I could not get that rate. They were very nice, checked my bookings and said, "No problem." They asked me to hold on while they put it through and told me each stateroom now has a \$200 OBC. IF you booked through a TA or another company (i.e., AARP), you have to go through them.

► Cheryl20772, May 13, 2010: The TA for AARP is Expedia. When doing a search on its site, they show discounts for Military, firemen/police and seniors, but no resident discount as shown on the Celebrity site. The price is the same (\$1149) for each of these with no mention if there is ability to stack discounts — say if you were military and over 55. We received \$100 OBC, but that has changed for new customers to only \$50 per cabin. We paid the same as anyone living in MD using the resident discount on the Celebrity site, plus we got \$100 OBC. If you had used AARP, you could have gotten an extra \$100 OBC for each room, but that was reduced to \$50 OBC per room on May 11. The promotional OBC seems to be the biggest difference, but that becomes less and less as departure date nears. When you get a discount, usually the documents have wording saying that if you cant prove your eligibility for that

discount, you will have to pay full fare. Its easy enough to prove what state you live in — or how old you are.

► SeaBlu, May 13, 2010: I went on-line with AARP and as you said I ended up with Expedia. I noted we were “Seniors,” it did not give me a place to note “resident of,” so I assume that they are not giving us that discount. I “booked” (everything but my credit card) an Aqua Class stateroom, the same as we have booked. The bottom line price is only about \$18 less per stateroom (two person occupancy) than we originally paid. Plus the \$50/OBC, which you said you were getting \$100. BUT if you had booked with Celebrity you would now be getting the “residents rate” and have a \$200 OBC and the cruise would be costing you that \$200 less. I would say that AARP is offering you nothing, just passing you on and before the special rate Expedia only offered you the \$100 discount. I have a very good friend that is a TA and she would have given you at least that amount as an OBC and then gotten you the lower rate when it appeared. I don’t think that Expedia will give you the lower rate as they “pre-purchase” their cabins, but you could try asking. Will Expedia give you a full refund if you cancel and re-book? But that may be too much trouble for an additional \$100.

► Cruising Grandma, May 13, 2010: On Celebrity’s site, the Aquaclass state-rooms are \$1149 for seniors, military or state residency rates. The cruise prices are the same wherever you book the cruise; however, some travel agencies offer different incentives (onboard credit, wine or champagne, gratuities, or travel insurance or hotel nights pre/post cruise) for your business. They get your commission instead of the cruise line. Royal Caribbean & Celebrity will credit your account before final payment and give onboard credit after final payment, if you notify them of a price drop for your category state-room. Some travel agencies will call the cruise line for your lower prices, and some wont or charge a fee for any change.

► Cheryl20772, May 13, 2010: I just got off the phone with AARP/Expedia and they said the rates are not stackable. I can have either the resident rate or the senior rate and the cabin costs \$1149 either way. That matches my pre-booking research too. I only used the TA for the OBC, and because we had that 15% certificate to manage.

► Cruising Grandma, May 13, 2010: That is the senior rate: Anyone 55+ qualifies for it whether booking through a cruise line or a travel agent. I love being able to check that box, don’t you? Your 15 % onboard credit will help

out, too! Tips can be put onboard account to use it, if you don't book excursions or specialty restaurants.

► Cheryl20772, May 13, 2010:

The Expedia rates are in this table.

► Cruising Grandma, May 13, 2010:

The state residency rate is also \$1149.

same price — no double discounts.

You either book senior, residency, military or fireman/policeman.

► SeaBlu, May 13, 2010: So it appears that in the end you did get the \$2298 rate. That is good, I just did not want anyone to pay more than they had to pay.

Rate Type	Per Passenger	Cabin Price
Senior Citizen	\$1,149	\$2,298
Military Rate	\$1,149	\$2,298
Standard	\$1,249	\$2,498

DISEMBARKING

► DarryDFL, June 20, 2010: First disembarking group (Luggage Tag 1) called at 7:35 AM. Last disembarking group called at 8:45 AM.

► Javanaut, July 2, 2010: We did Express Self-assist Debarkation and were off the ship at 7:20. You gotta be able to carry or roll all of your bags without help. We only have one big bag and two carry-ons just for this reason and, because when we fly, we only have to pay for one. We met in the theater at 7 AM for 7:15 AM debarkation. On other X ships I have been on, Concierge Class self-assist people have gotten off even before the masses of self-assist people.

► Cruising Grandma, July 3, 2010: If you fly Delta very much, it is worthwhile to get their American Express Sky Miles Card. If you have one, up to nine people in your group have their first checked luggage free. It saved us nearly \$150 last three flights, because we carry one checked each and one carry on each. The card is free for the first year, and they add mega-miles for using it, which helps get free flights. They also send a \$99 companion certificate yearly after the first year.

DRINKS

► **ALCOHOL:** Aaron7788, May 10, 2010: Purchasing the new Classic Drink Package for my girlfriend and I. It's about \$90-a-day for two. The only limitation is we are unable to order drinks in the room, and the premium drinks

are still full price. Between non-alcoholic drinks and alcoholic drinks during meals, and throughout the day, do you think the price is worth it?

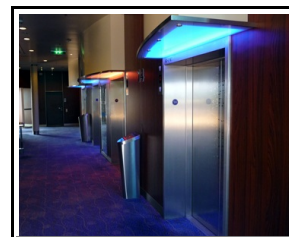
► **COFFEE** — DarryDFL, June 22, 2010: This is the first ship (in 21 cruises) where the coffee is consistently great throughout the ship. On most ships, the coffee in the dining room is superb; but, tends to be heavier than crank case oil.

► **SODA**: Cruising Grandma, May 9, 2010: soda card package for \$40 pp for a week

► **SODA**: SeaBlu, May 11, 2010: I purchased the soda package for the 4 of us. Mostly for convenience for DH and I and for the “joy of it” for our grandchildren.

ELEVATORS

► DarryDFL, June 23, 2010: The elevators are numerous. In addition to the chime, orange lights appear above the door — replacing the blue lights — when it arrives so hearing-impaired people notice.



LAPTOP

► DarryDFL, June 11, 2010: In answer to DuffysMom: “Does the ship have wifi in the staterooms or is it in certain areas of the ship? Is it worth taking a computer or should we use the computer café.”

While I can not tell you about this ship specifically, I would bet your career that if you buy the Internet Package, you’ll have Web access via WiFi in your cabin.

A friend, traveling on the Freedom of the Sea in August of last year, wrote, “My signal and Internet connection have been good. The speed from the Internet Café is 520 kbps, and the speed from my cabin (WiFi) is 780 kbps. It is much slower than cable broadband, but not bad for a ship in open seas. \$55.00 for 150 min (\$0.37/min); I only used about 2-4 minutes per post.”

We carry our laptop for a much better reason. We use it to upload our photos every night. Since, between the two of us, we take 800-1000 photos a day, it keeps our camera cards open and ready for action.

We believe that when one sees that one “Kodak Moment,” she should take 3 shots — one of which will be that moment.

➤ Javanaut, June 11, 2010: I do buy an internet package but I bring the computer primarily for pictures as well. I like to get my pictures organized and clean on sea days or at night. Seems like if I wait until I get home to do pictures, it never gets off my “to do” list. I don’t take that many pictures a day but if I see something moving (flying fish, butterfly, bird, eagle, whale, etc., I will just lay on my burst and hope one comes out. I download email, Facebook, and such and read them offline to save minutes.

LIFEBOAT DRILL

➤ DarryDFL, June 13, 2010: The Life Boat Drill was at 4 PM. The stations are inside — in the theater and in some lounges — and there is no requirement to bring life preservers to the drill.

LUGGAGE

➤ Cruising Grandma, May 14, 2010: We received our luggage tags in the mail today. [NOTE: Cruise begins 13 June.]

➤ SeaBlu, May 14, 2010: We got our luggage tags last week, plus I ordered a second set and we got those on Monday!

➤ Cheryl20772, May 19, 2010: Ours tags came yesterday. Do this:

❶ Go to <http://www.celebritycruises.com/> .

❷ Log in by clicking on the link “My Celebrity” at the top right of that page.

❸ Click on “My Reservations” and where it says “please select” in the box, choose “Manage my Reservation” and click the Go button.

❹ On the next page, there’s a blue box on the left side and just below that there’s the “Luggage Tag Information” section. Click “Request Luggage Tags” and fill in the next page.

❺ If you don’t have a reservation there to manage, then you just need to enter your booking info at the bottom of that first page and it will set a section up for you.

❻ There’s a tab in your reservation section to do your online check in and you should do that as well and print out your Xpress pass.

➤ DarryDFL, May 27, 2010: In addition to the cruise ships luggage tags, we use 3”x 5,” laminated labels — in bright yellow — on our luggage listing name, address, phone number & email address. It makes them easy to spot from a distance. Also, we have business card size labels — with the same info —

attached inside of the luggage. (One cruiser had a problem with an airline because his outside tag disappeared.) The white tag, in the photo, is our “luggage contents” tag. It tells which has the formal wear, which has the electronics, etc. Our friend, GrumpyGramps, places a large strip of red duct tape with his cabin number, in large, black letters, printed on it.

► Cruising Grandma, May 27, 2010: We have a fabric tie on top of our luggage, and inside an index card with my mobile phone #. If anyone finds my luggage with an outside tag off, they can call me, and I can claim my lost bag.

MARANO'S RESTAURANT

► DarryDFL, June 23, 2010: Marano's Restaurant, where we celebrated my in-law's 50th anniversary has great food and great service; but, is over-priced. Instead of one waiter, every time something was served, a different person appeared. If you wanted bread, you had to ask when they came with it; it was not left on the table. The “gratuities” charge does not include the tip.

MONEY

► Cheryl20772, May 22, 2010: I'm curious about currency. Somewhere I read that the currencies on the “French side” are in Euros. What is the currency on the other side? Do we need to plan on exchanging currencies or should we just use our credit card and let Master Card figure it all out? How do you handle the differences in currencies?

► The Big Booper, May 22, 2010: The only times we have used plastic on St. Martin are in the Philipsburg stores for cameras, jewelry, etc. Just about all places take US dollars. Taxis, beach bars and restaurants, lounge and umbrella rentals. Some places have 2 price boards, one for \$ and one for Euros. We have found some places that treat \$=Euros 1-to-1. All you need are \$. ATMs on the French side only dispense Euros. On the Dutch side, multi currencies.

► Snorkel2Much, June 8, 2010: If you are planning to use your credit cards in the Caribbean, you should call your CC company now and let them know your travel plans. Due to fraud issues, many will automatically block offshore transactions unless you have a recent history of such purchases. It only takes a few minutes now, but the phone rates per minute in the Caribbean can be steep in some places if you wait to call from there.

- DarryDFL, June 10, 2010: All the ports we're visiting accept US currency. Puerto Rico and St. Thomas, as a US territories, use US currency the same as in the states. If you've got a US credit card, you've got currency.
- Snorkel2Much, June 11, 2010: On St Maarten/St Martin, just about any business that has any chance to support the tourist trade accepts US dollars, and marks their prices accordingly. Some of the off-the-beaten-path grocery stores and "locals" shops mark prices only in Netherlands Antilles Guilders (Dutch side) or Euros (French side), but even those take US dollars.

MOTEL

- SeaBlu, May 14, 2010: Because we are going to be in Fort Lauderdale for 3 nights and have a car, we looked for a good hotel price that did not have to be right in Fort Lauderdale. We found a really good deal at the Westin in North Fort Lauderdale. For the first night, we pay the going rate; but for the next two nights, we pay the amount equal to the year I was born. (I was born in 1947, so we pay \$47/night.) We felt that was a great deal at a nice hotel for the four of us. We are going to be driving around sightseeing anyway so if we drive 5 minutes or 20 minutes the morning of the cruise does not matter to us. We read that there is a parking location right outside that port where you can park, it is suppose to cost a little less and they will shuttle you into the port.
- Cheryl20772, May 14, 2010: If you prefer to save \$\$, my research brought up Park N Fly Cruise which is half a mile from the pier, and Airport Park N Go Cruise Parking, Ft Lauderdale. Both have free shuttle buses to and from the port. There are various group discounts, such as AARP and AAA, but reserve in advance by going through the links on the group websites. I don't know what effect the Oasis crowds have had on parking availability.

We will be driving from up north & plan to stay at the *Days Inn on West Broward Blvd*. The Days Inn has "Paid Parking For Guests That Want To Leave Their Vehicle For A Long Period Of Time But Charges Will Apply, Contact The Hotel For Details". Id bet most of the hotels near the port also have parking arrangements. We prefer to use a lot that has parking as their primary business and not trust the kind of security found in motel parking lots.

- Cruising Grandma, May 20, 2010: We've stayed in several hotels in Ft. Lauderdale, bidding on Priceline.com most of the time.
- Javanaut, May 31, 2010: I made reservations at the Hyatt Summerfield in Ft Lauderdale. We have not stayed there before. Parking is free for 7 nights

— \$8 for the 8th night. Shuttle to ship is contracted at \$8/pp each way. The parking is gated and lighted according to <http://www.ParkSleepFly.com>. I called the hotel and got AARP price (\$2 less than ParkSleepFly and reviews on ParkSleepFly were not good — cost more than quoted). I did not ask about gated and lighted. The evening social is 5:30–7. I was thinking 6-ish would be good.

► Cruising Grandma, June 1, 2010: We are staying at the Embassy Suites on Saturday. There are nightly social there, too, but I think its just for guests. They do offer a complimentary made-to-order breakfast and complimentary shuttle to the port. I don't know about parking, since we will be flying down.

► Hedda E, June 2, 2010: We did PriceLine for a Saturday night hotel and ended up with The Westin Beach Resort, Fort Lauderdale. I've never stayed there before. but the pictures look nice, If it turns out badly, I'll at least have a story to tell at the connections party. They don't have a cruise parking deal. In fact, we have to pay even as a hotel guest so we'll likely park at the port.

► LizFLL, June 3, 2010: The Westin Fort Lauderdale is gorgeous (and relatively new)! Really a great top choice hotel!! I can't imagine you'd have a bad experience there.

► DarryDFL, June 22, 2010: We stayed at the Homewood Suites, 954-967-9063. We got a room for four for \$119 plus tax. If you stay one night, you can park your car for a week at no cost. It offers a Courtesy Shuttle for \$6 to go to the port and \$10 to come back. It offers a list of 12 restaurants to which you can get a free shuttle ride between 4–10 PM. Also it has a list of four places that will deliver to the motel. (You coordinate with the front desk hostess who orders and pays the delivery person so no one knows your motel room except her.) If Marife Lehrer is the hostess, she can answer any questions you have about the local area.

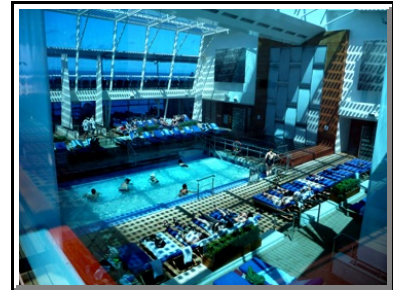
NEWS, WORLD

► DarryDFL, June 23, 2010: World news is printed and available daily at the Business Desk at 10 AM. News is printed for US, Canada, Britain, Latin America (in Spanish), France (in French), and Germany (in German).



POOLS

► DarryDFL, June 24, 2010: There were two main pools. The one without the roof was for everyone while the one (Adult Solarium) covered with glass and solar panels. There were, as expected, many chairs and chaise lounges; and, unexpectedly, many shady spots where one would sit without getting sun burned.



RENTAL CAR

► The Big Booper, May 14, 2010: We have a Hertz car and plan to turn it in at FLL (Fort Lauderdale Airport). After we finish the cruise, we plan to pick up another rental car at FLL for our next 8 days in Florida, also at FLL. Hertz is still running shuttles from the FLL Airport to the pier, correct? I know Avis doesn't anymore.

► DarryDFL, June 22, 2010: We contemplated renting a car in Tampa, Florida, on Saturday (before the cruise), driving it to Fort Lauderdale, and turning it in on Sunday after we dropped off our luggage. Then renting a car on the Sunday we returned, driving it to Tampa, and turning it in. That plan was a non-starter because the local rental car companies are closed on Sunday. If you rent one at the airport, you must be going out on a flight from that airport. (I'm told it's one of the changes from the 9/11 terrorist attack.)

SAN JUAN

► Self-guided Walking Tour of San Juan: <http://tinyurl.com/39ay4tx> or <http://www.puertoricodaytrips.com/old-san-juan-walking-tour-1/> .

► Cheryl20772, May 15, 2010: I just bought our tickets for the 2:30 PM excursion to the Bacardi Rum Distillery in San Juan. That's the only thing on our must-do list for this cruise. When we get back from that, if we feel like it, we might walk over to the segway tour and do that.

► Cruising Grandma, May 15, 2010: We have been to all three of these ports many times, and we'll visit San Juan and St. Thomas the cruise before this one. I know we'll go to Orient Beach on St. Maarten, and probably Magen's Bay in St. Thomas, and maybe back to the beach in San Juan. We enjoy days spent on beaches.

- SeaBlu, May 16, 2010: The four of us are also going to do the Bacardi Tour, in San Juan. We have wanted to do it on previous visits to PR and for whatever reasons have not.
- The Big Booper, May 16, 2010: We did the Bacardi tour, in San Juan, on the *Explorer* out of NY so we had no air travel. We could, therefore, stock up on the really good stuff they sell. They have a sampling area where you can sample, in paper cups, all the varieties that the company sells.
- Cruising Grandma, May 23, 2010: We normally walk to the beach. There are also horse drawn carriage rides.
- SeaBlu, May 26, 2010: So far, the only shore excursion we have planned is the Bacardi Rum Factory Tour.
- Javanaut, May 26, 2010: We are booked for the Bacardi Rum Factory.
- Cruising Grandma, May 26, 2010: We will be going to a beach in San Juan. Then just walk around after sundown or go back to the ship.
- DarryDFL, May 27, 2010: We enjoyed walking around. If you're into photography, the photos from the fort are breath-taking. Were working on a slide-show from our last cruise there.
- Marcij, May 27, 2010: We are in Aqua class with the other two couples. I think at least one couple is doing the Bacardi tour, but my husband and I are doing the Segway tour.
- DarryDFL, June 10, 2010: Although there are free trolleys, they are not very dependable. We waited for the every-15-minutes trolley for over an hour. Two arrived — one right behind the other — 15 minutes after we gave up and moved on.

ST MAARTEN

- The Big Booper, May 16, 2010: We like St Maarten because we like the beaches, shopping, restaurants, and the airplanes at Maho. You could stay on the island a month, eat out 3 times a day at good places, and never have to repeat a restaurant. The island is reasonably safe even though with the worldwide recession there is an increase in crime. The people by and large are friendly, even those on the French side! And they drive on the right. The island is not a sub-tropical rainforest so it can look desert-like scruffy outside the built-up areas, especially with low rainfalls. The Philippsburg shopping equals St. Thomas with slightly lower prices. The shopping at Marigot is very French and the sporadic Marigot flea markets have lots of unique stuff; not

the usual island stuff. And, of course, the Port Royale Marina at Marigot with a dozen or more really good restaurants on a boardwalk running alongside the yacht slips in a “U” configuration. There are a number of well-known artists who work on the island. For those who want to, there is a company that organizes tours.

► Cruising Grandma, May 16, 2010: St. Maarten is also one of our favorites! The first time we went, we stayed a week on Little Bay in a hotel. Our daughter and son still recall that vacation as one of our best. The following week, we went to Aruba. Our children were both teens and loved the trip. We have been back many times on cruises without the “children”. Now, we go to Orient Beach for the day, unless we meet cruisers who want to see the island. We have rented a car, and taken people around to the different beaches, the flea market on the French side, and Maho to see the planes. This trip, we’ll be going to Orient Beach.

► Cruising Grandma, May 17, 2010: [CHeryl20772 wrote: I need to know if they have nice bathrooms on Orient Beach.] The only “nice restrooms” I have found were at Club Orient, the nudist beach resort — also a nice grocery/gift shop. But if nudity bothers you, don’t go there.

► SeaBlu, May 22, 2010: We did a “bus tour of the Island,” and it was really enjoyable. We did not get to spend long on the French side that time so we may go back over there this time.

► Cruising Grandma, May 26, 2010: We will definitely be going to Orient Beach in St. Martin.

► Marcij, May 27, 2010: We are in Aqua class with the other two couples traveling with us. We’ve hired Bernard’s for a private tour on St. Martin.

► DarryDFL, May 27, 2010: If you’re on a budget, or just like to walk around, on St. Maarten, try the shops & beach at Great Bay. You’ll have to take a water taxi from the dock to the beach, but its enjoyable and about \$5 to go to and from on the water taxi. See our notes on the island under “Cruising” at <http://DarryD.com>.

► Snorkel2Much, May 29, 2010:

★ Link to Chez Pats at Le Galion in St. Martin:

<http://www.sxm-orientbeach.com/chezpat/>

★ Map to Le Galion and main beaches of St. Martin/Maarten:

http://www.sint-maarten.net/St-Maarten-Beaches/stmaarten_Beaches.html

★ Link to Grand Case Beach Club in St. Martin:

<http://www.snorkel-trips-sxm.com/www.snorkel-trips-sxm.com/Welcome.html>

★ The beach at Petite Plage/Grand Case is usually tiny, so it's a fallback plan only for us. (Storms steal the sand from the beach often.)

➤ Javanaut, June 7, 2010: We just booked the America's Cup Sailing Regatta excursion for St Maarten.

ST. THOMAS

➤ Cruising Grandma, May 15, 2010: Well probably visit Magen's Bay.

➤ DarryDFL, May 27, 2010: On St. Thomas, you've got to take the stroll to the lift up to Paradise Point where you can see almost the entire island and the entire port. See our notes under "Cruising" at <http://DarryD.com>.

➤ Cruising Grandma, May 21, 2010: At the Paradise Point tram, if you have AAA, there was a discount years ago, so bring your card. You can purchase tickets at the tram.

➤ Cruising Grandma, May 26, 2010: We will definitely be going to some beach in St. Thomas (depends on which one we go to on our first cruise)

➤ Marcij, May 27, 2010: We are in Aqua class with the other two couples traveling with us. Were not sure about St. Thomas/St. John. We took the ferry last summer over to St. John with our kids and that was fun, so we might do that again.

➤ Snorkel2Much, May 29, 2010:

★ Dive shop at Secret Harbour, <http://www.aadivers.com/>

★ Map to Secret Harbour: <http://www.secretharbourvi.com/maps.asp>

➤ Snorkel2Much, June 7, 2010:

★ Crown Bay Marina map: <http://tinyurl.com/25fh6z5>

★ Map of St Thomas: <http://tinyurl.com/25fh6z5>

★ Map of St Thomas: <http://tinyurl.com/2drxusx>

THEATER

➤ DarryDFL, June 23, 2010: Every show was superb. Arrive early for the Friday night show, "The Solstice," because it was packed. The other shows had plenty of room; but, not that show. The "Stars of Solstice" were talented sang, danced and moved like Broadway stars.

WEBSITES

- Darry D's Photos: <http://DarryD.com/Photos>
- Lee's Photos, Solstice, May 23–29, 2010: Celebrity Today (daily events), Bar Menus, Photos — <http://schplinky.smugmug.com/Solstice-2010>
- Peggy Shanabrook Eggleston's Facebook Photos of Solstice: <http://tinyurl.com/26upjp9>