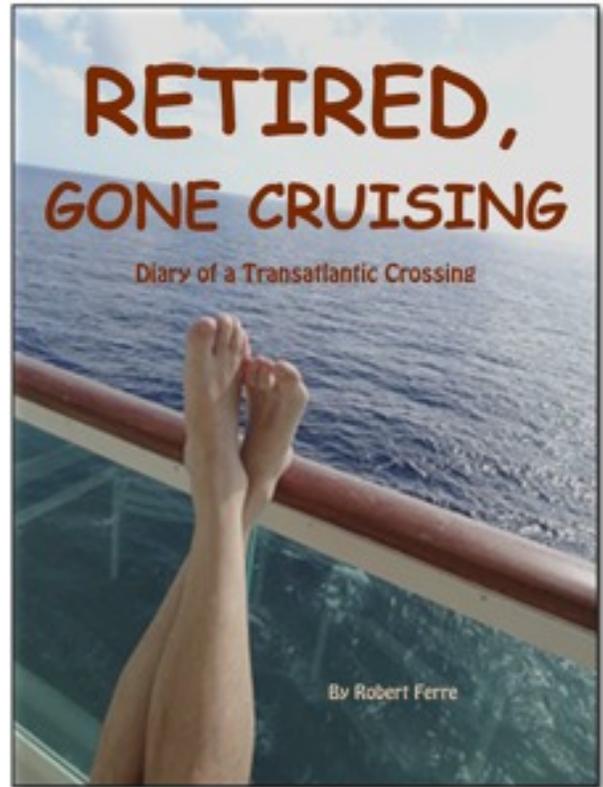


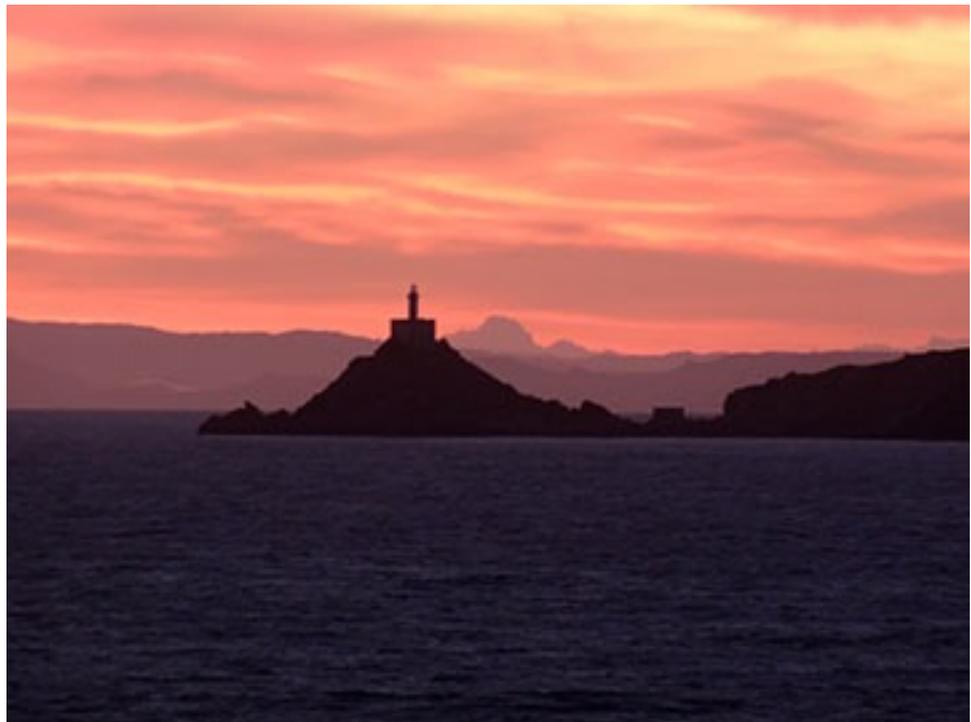
PART III: PORTS OF CALL

We quickly adjusted to the rhythm of being aboard a ship, a seagoing rhythm that hasn't changed very much for 100 years of cruise ships and ocean liners. For dinner I had sea bass, which was excellent. It appeared to be a deliberate strategy to impress us from the outset with the menu choices. It worked. We were impressed. The sea was calm and the temperature moderate, so we slept with the door open, listening to the water, roiled by the ships passing.

In the morning we had a mystery. We awoke to a gorgeous sunrise while passing close to land on the port side. Our knowledge of geography was so inadequate that we couldn't figure out what island we were seeing. I knew Malta and Sicily were too distant. It turned out to be Sardinia. A lighthouse perched on the rocks made a silhouette against the red and yellow sky (below, right). searching Google, I never found this lighthouse.



This was a sea day, one of ten on the voyage. Two more days were for embarkment and debarkation, and five were days in which we stopped at ports of call, for a total of 17 days. We like sea days the most, but when in port, we usually do get off and walk around a bit, maybe buy the odd T-shirt or scarf.



Risks still passing Sardinia



On day 2 the welcome aboard reception by our very personable Danish captain, Flemming B. Nielsen (still called Master of the ship, as in days of old) included free champagne for everyone, poured by the table full, which must have added up to quite a tab.



The flying buttresses are so massive that the space between them is no greater than the width of the buttresses, essentially hiding the wall from view, yet letting light in to the windows. Inside, the soaring height of the bays reminds me of the unique cathedral in Bourges, France, also built in the “southern style” with no transepts. When the sun came out, the light passing through the modern stained glass rose window dappled the pillars and floor with all colors of the rainbow. A second rose window is visible at the other end of the nave.

MAJORCA

Morning found us in Palma de Majorca, a place I have wanted to visit to see its Gothic Cathedral. Compared with French cathedrals, which have tall, steep roofs, this one seemed to have no roof at all.





The cathedral is in Majorca's Old Town, which has narrow streets and noteworthy architecture. To the left is a photo of the new part of town, taken from the ship (our balcony). Typically, the port facilities are in the foreground.



CARTAGENA, SPAIN

Our next port was Cartagena, Spain. We had been there before, on our *Voyager* trip. To the left is a photo from that cruise, with Linda standing in front of *Voyager of the Seas* in Cartagena. To the right, is a photo from this cruise, with Linda standing in front of *Mariner of the Seas*. We walked down the waterfront, coming upon the same accordion player that we had listened to on our previous visit. We bought some stamps and mailed our postcards.



After returning to the ship for lunch, we sat out on our balcony, enjoying the view of town (left). The size of the people and boats below give some idea of the height of the ship, and we were only on Deck 8 (about 12 stories up). When the ship pulled away from the dock, around 50 people gathered below to wave and see us off. It was reminiscent of the ocean liners of a bygone era. I would have thrown streamers, had I had any.



FUNCHAL, MADEIRA

Our next stop was Funchal, Madeira. Our *Voyager* cruise stopped here, too. This is an island that is part of Portugal, but is close to Morocco, Africa. We love this island and would like to return for a longer stay. Old Town (right) was mostly deserted as we arrived on a holiday. This town has many, many pedestrian streets, all with a surface of stone chips arranged in black and white patterns.



The area where Linda is standing (left), across from a lush park, was a hot spot for WiFi. We were able to sit on a park bench and do our email for free. On the ship it is 65 cents per minute, slow, and temperamental.

In Europe, people gather in public squares to sit and talk, often older retired men. Right is one such example, in Funchal. Below is another, taken before our cruise, in Levanto, Italy. The closest we come in the U.S. to such a phenomenon is gathering at Starbuck's.



Another ship in port, *Aida Sol*, had an unusual atrium arrangement in the center of the ship (right). In Majorca we saw the *Aida Bella*, which had the same kind of atrium. They also had hammocks, which could be a place of respite if the ship is rocking. Seafarers used to sleep in hammocks. The key is to sleep at a diagonal, almost flat, not end to end like a banana.

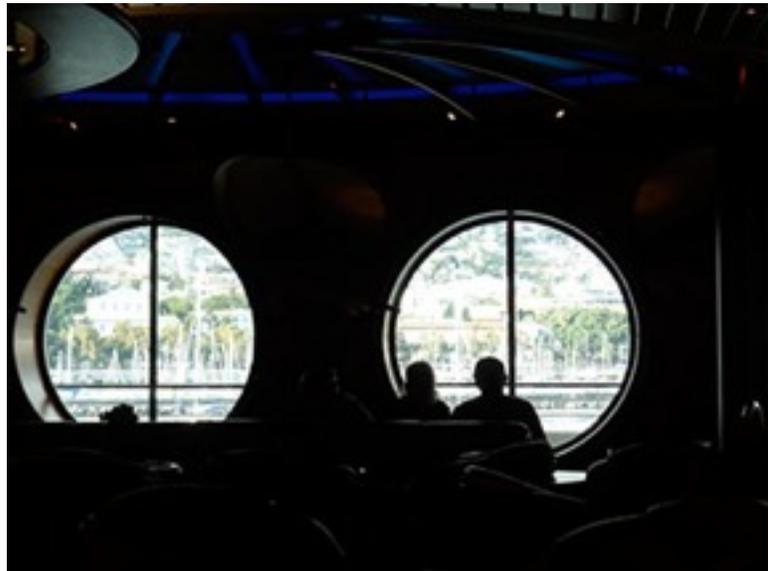


On the front of their ship (right, below) were giant red lips. Somehow, that makes it hard to take the ship seriously. Below is a publicity photo from the web. The *Sol* holds 2,000 passengers to our 3,000. Aida is a German company (see www.aida.de).



LA PALMA, CANARY ISLANDS

In La Palma, Canary Islands, I didn't take any photos except this one through the round windows of one of the bars. These really aren't portholes, they are just trying to imply a maritime theme. Other than this, the ship is decorated more like a hotel than a ship. In fact, they assiduously avoid maritime themes. I think that shows once again that the cruise is not about the sea or being a ship.



NASSAU, BAHAMAS

We docked next to a Carnival ship (below). I forget which one (Ecstasy? Named after an illegal drug?) It was smaller than our ship. Look at how few balconies there are. Beyond the Carnival ship was *Majesty of the seas*, another Royal Caribbean ship.



This is a port where the town is close by, easy for walking. Earlier in the fall, several ships were diverted from other ports due to hurricanes, leading to seven cruise ships being in port at the same time. That was a record. Think of fifteen to twenty thousand people wandering down the main street. It must have been crazy. We went to our “secret” place (Van Breugel's Bistro and Bar on Charlotte Street South) for a cold Kalik (a local Bahamian Beer). We also did our email there, and I had some curried conch soup.



Back at the dock, we saw a gorgeous yacht, named *Samar*. It boggles the mind how people can afford these things. (The owner is a Kuwaiti oilman.) Besides the helicopter on the upper deck, there is a “garage” for a smaller runabout, with 600 h.p. of inboard engine. Somewhere, there is also a Mini Cooper for getting around on land. The ship is 254 feet long.

The owner’s suite (right) is a bit fancier than our stateroom on *Mariner*. This yacht may be chartered during its current stay in the Caribbean, accommodating 12 passengers and a crew of 26, of which 20 run the boat and six cook and wait on the passengers in various capacities. The weekly rental? \$350,000. That’s all. Disappointingly, it cruises at only 12 knots, half of what our huge ship can do.





Here is a publicity photo of Samar (above). There is quite a bit about it on the internet.

On November 11, as scheduled, we pulled into our final port, Galveston (right), where we disembarked and headed to the airport in Houston for the short hop home to San Antonio.



This ends Part III. There are eight parts.