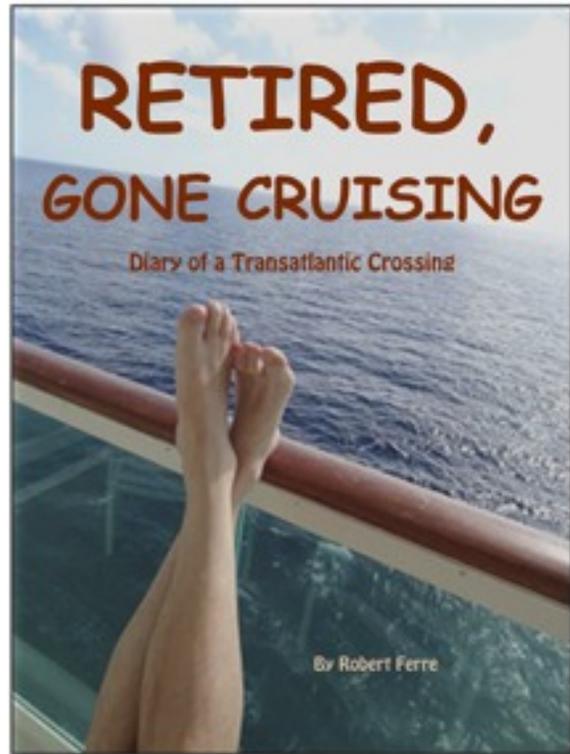


PART IV: LET YOU ENTERTAIN ME

Every evening, for sixteen days in a row, we attended the evening entertainment. In the not-so-good old days, passengers provided their own entertainment. Nowadays, ships have full theaters and extravagant production shows as well as individual entertainers. Before going to the shows, we had wonderful sit-down dinners in the main dining room.

What would it cost for a delicious dinner followed by a night of entertainment, for two? I would guess that \$100 wouldn't be out of line. One day, I wrote down everything that I ate and calculated what that would have cost in Italy, where we had stayed for two weeks, the typical prices still being in my head. Answer? About \$90. We each paid less than \$100 a day for this cruise, which includes not just the food and entertainment, but the transportation across the Atlantic and access to a beautiful ship with many amenities. This was a tremendous bargain.



Usually, there were two identical shows, one at 7 p.m. and one at 9 p.m., but sometimes it was changed to 9 p.m. and 10:45 p.m. The dining room has two major sitting times, one early and one late. So early eaters go to the late show and late diners go to the show first and then eat.

The theater seats more than 1,600 people, including balconies at the sides and back. We liked the front row of the second side balcony. To

get those seats, we arrived 30 or so minutes early and played a card game (Phase 10) to amuse ourselves until show time.



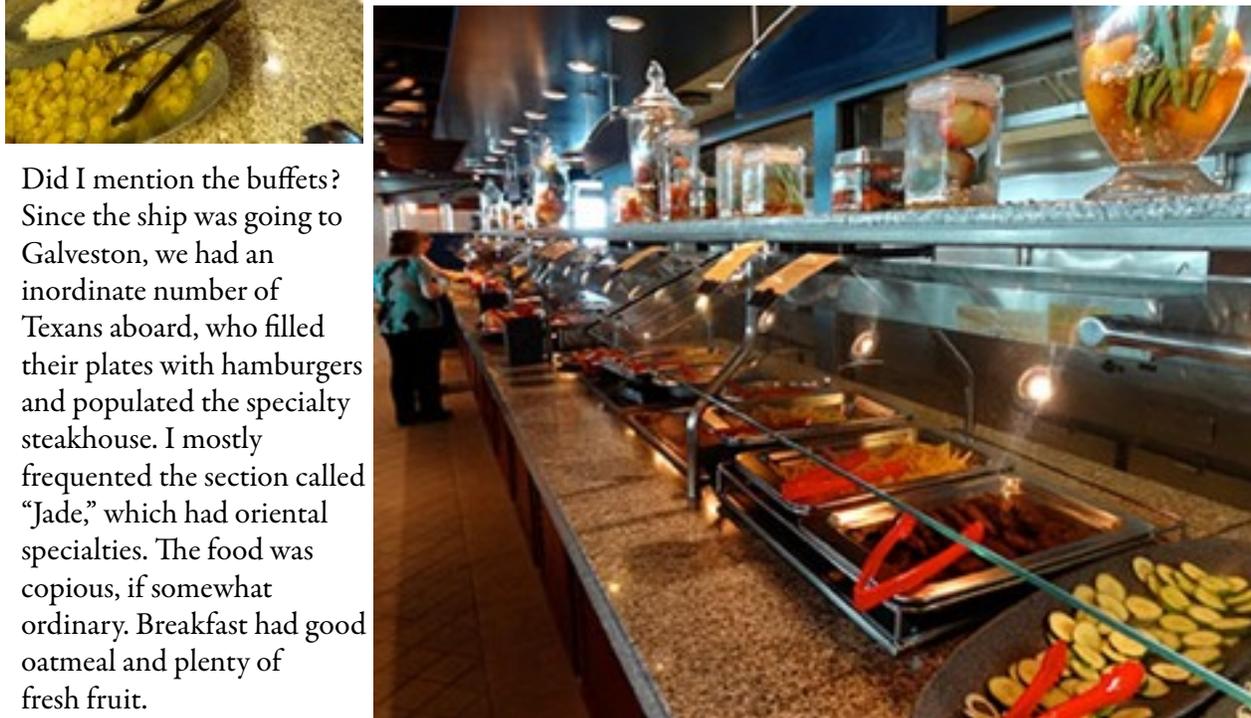
The main entrance to the Savoy Theater is on Deck 3. The photo (left) shows two sets of stairs, descending from Decks 5 and 4 down to Deck 3. From these photos, you start to get an idea of how immense and spacious this ship actually is. And now there are ships 40% bigger than this one.

To the right is Merrill Osmond, of the Osmond Brothers, doing a solo show. He had so much pre-recorded background music and vocals that it was almost like doing karaoke. The *Mariner* has its own band which accompanies many of the performers with only an hour or two of practice and preparation. Quite impressive. With Osmond, the band mostly sat with little to do. The brothers became famous 50 years ago on the Andy Williams TV show. Now they are playing in Branson, MO, at the Andy Williams Theater, filling in for Andy, who is undergoing cancer treatment.



The main theater is used for many events. We attended lectures there, and this choir concert (above) by passengers. The ship also has an ice skating facility that seats 900 spectators. Here (right) was *Big Top on Ice* featuring a dozen professional skaters. Some of what they did was quite dazzling. Each had a chance to do an individual routine. The ship's rocking must have been quite a challenge, skating on ice that moves. The costumes were dazzling.





Did I mention the buffets? Since the ship was going to Galveston, we had an inordinate number of Texans aboard, who filled their plates with hamburgers and populated the specialty steakhouse. I mostly frequented the section called "Jade," which had oriental specialties. The food was copious, if somewhat ordinary. Breakfast had good oatmeal and plenty of fresh fruit.



For dinners and a few other meals, we preferred the more formal dining room. Each meal offered two hot soups, one cold soup (almost always my choice), and sixteen other dishes, either appetizers or main courses.

Our table, being right by the window, was quite spectacular and romantic, watching the sea and the setting sun. The dining room itself (right) wasn't so bad, either. In the mornings it offers a breakfast buffet as well as ordering items from the menus.



For dinner, I usually had cold fruit soup, a seafood or vegetarian selection, and a tasty dessert. It was hard not to eat too many rolls, of which there was a tempting variety. If you didn't like your dish, you could ask for something different. There was no limit on quantity. If you wanted three appetizers or four desserts, no problem. Our waiters, Valentin (Romania) and Jude (India) were very well trained.



The specialty restaurant, Portofino, (right) costs \$20 per person extra. The setting was good, but the food, while tasty, confused quality with quantity. I never like my dinner to be bigger than I am, nor to be forced between overeating or being wasteful. Too much food is not classy.



There are other venues for eating besides the buffet and dining room.

Above, left, is the free ice cream machine. Above is Johnny Rocket's, an old-fashioned diner which has, I am told, excellent onion rings. The Promenade Cafe (below) has free food and desserts as well as gallons of coffee, open 24 hours a day.



Since the food venues repeat the same menus every few weeks for years, fixing some 20,000 dinners a week, they can predict, statistically, almost exactly what passengers will order -- how many will choose fish, or chicken, or steak. This allows them an accuracy in buying supplies that no land-based restaurant could ever match, allowing them to prepare a greater variety. In the 1920's and '30's, in First Class on the great steam-powered ocean liners, men wore white tie formal wear every evening, and women wore different evening gowns each night. That's why they brought along those huge steamer trunks full of clothes, sometimes 20 or 30 of them. We had a lot of luggage, but not quite that bad. We had one small carry-on of "cruise clothes" that we dragged with us for six weeks through Europe. I wore a blazer and tie, not a suit or tux, as some people did. Linda had a black dress and different accessories, mostly scarves. She always looked great.

This ends Part IV. There are eight parts.