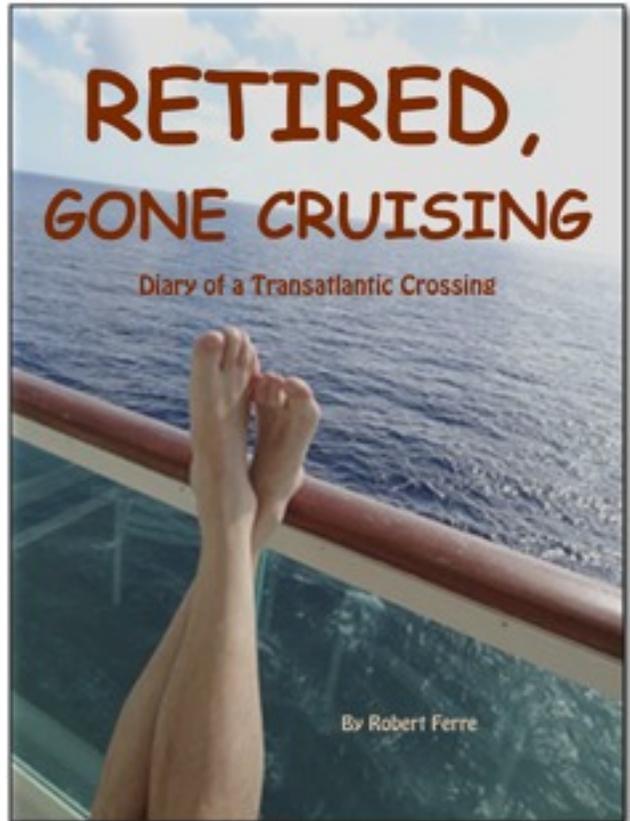


PART VI: DECKS AND POOLS

The size of *Mariner of the Seas* boggles the mind, and she is far from being the largest cruise ship. The total area of all of the decks, ranging from tank top (lowest, under which are the tanks for fuel and water, which also serve as ballast) to the chapel on Deck 15, is around 30 acres. Yes, 30 football fields. Of course not all of it is open to the public.

The ship is 1,021 feet long and 127 feet across the beam. Of course it isn't a rectangle, as the bow comes to a point. So let's just estimate that a rectangle of similar area would be around 1,000 feet by 120 feet. That would equal 120,000 sq. ft. for that one deck, just under three acres. No wonder the upper deck has room for a rock climbing wall, a basketball court, a putt-putt mini-golf course, a walking track, several pools, space for lounging, a solarium, and more.



Five times around the track is a mile. Counting theaters, bars, dining room, and lounge chairs, there are 15,000 place to sit for the 3,000 passengers. Except when half the passengers are in the theater, most of the time you look around and wonder, "where is everyone?" It isn't crowded, as some people mistakenly believe.



In addition to buying drinks in the theater, ice rink, and disco, there are also nine other bars. The sale of alcoholic beverages is one of the principal profit centers for Royal Caribbean. In the photo (left) is the Sky Bar, on the top deck. Actually, you can get a drink from any of the roving waiters without leaving your lounge chair. In the old days, crossing the chilly North Atlantic, stewards would come around with hot tea and bouillon.

Apparently, Royal Caribbean believes that entertainment is synonymous with noise, the louder the better. One of these is dancing by the pool, whether at a departure celebration, under the stars during the midnight buffet, or mid-afternoon. Here the staff demonstrates dance steps, which are mimicked by the dancers, all of whom face the stage. This is clever because it allows women (who outnumber men on the ship) to dance without needing to have a partner.



From the blue sky it is obviously a beautiful day, probably in the upper 70's, yet the pools and lounge chairs are largely empty. On cruises of this type and length, the demographic is for an older clientele. There were only 25 children onboard. On some Caribbean cruises at holiday time, there are hundreds of children who make the pool scene a livelier place.



I didn't count how many hot tubs there are (see left). At least six, each holding a dozen or more people, plus a pool-sized one indoors in the fitness center.

Because we lacked young people, Adventure Ocean was closed during our voyage. The arcade was open, but each time I passed through, the games were beeping to an empty room.



Left: Our ship, like most cruise ships, is registered in the Bahamas.

The recycling bins (right) bear the logo, "Save the Waves," which is part of Royal Caribbean's model ecological program. Tons of cans, glass, paper, and other materials are recycled. The proceeds are used to sponsor special events for the crew, giving them incentive to be diligent.



The spa has its own pool, separated from the main pool area by a building holding the Sky Bar and lounging terraces.



Deck 11 has glass side walls. Since the ship is traveling at around 23 miles an hour, without the walls it would be too windy to play cards or, in this case, Dominos.



Wherever there is a putting course and a driving range, there is a 19th Hole golf bar (above).

Royal Caribbean is very big on their rock climbing wall, advertising it as if it were a great adventure. Protected by harness and ropes, falling is not an option. I have seen people climbing rock faces in Colorado, hundreds of feet in the air, clinging to little ledges like Spiderman. I guess the danger of falling to your death is part of the high. I didn't try it, but this wall would be more my speed.





Here the basketball court is being used for volleyball. I wonder how many balls go overboard.

While there is a walking track on Deck 12 (below), we preferred to do our power walks on Decks 4 and 5, which are more enclosed, less windy, and out of the sun.



When the sea is rough and the ship rocking, the pools are emptied and covered with a net for safety (above). From the highest sun deck, you can look down at the wing of the bridge (right). There is also a place on Deck 11 where you can look through some windows and see part of the bridge. It is so huge, with only half a dozen people there, that it looks deserted.





The end of Deck 11 near the spa is enclosed, forming an area known as the solarium. The lounges are more comfortable than the ones by the pool. There is a gap in the glass wall that lets some fresh air in. Once again I ask the question, where are the passengers? Not here.

This pathetic little area with padded walls (right) is for roller blading. Get serious. They should reserve a time on the main walking track (below) for roller blading, where you could get some momentum going.



I have been asking where the people are but, frankly, except for taking photos or passing through, we never spent any time up on the open deck. We preferred relating to the sun and sea from the privacy of our balcony. After all, we paid for that privilege.

This ends Part VI. There are eight parts.