



Guest travel writer PJJ, Yonkers NY: About three years after I retired, my spouse and neighbor couple came up with a brilliant idea. "We're all going on a cruise".

"No, I'm not," I responded. I just didn't want to go to sea again. I had been on several cruises in my youth. The first was during WWII, consisting of a year aboard a Navy attack transport. Then, as a recalled reservist, a six-month assignment during the Korean War aboard an aircraft carrier.

Navy accommodations and food were adequate back then. However, my most vivid memories many decades later were that during those cruises, some very unfriendly people were out there on the oceans and in the skies trying to kill me. Three weeks after the cruise was booked, I was reluctantly climbing the gangway of the Royal Caribbean's Vision Of The Seas. The seven-night trip from the port of San Pedro near Los Angeles included visits to coastal towns along Baja, the Mexican Riviera. They included Cabo San Lucas, Mazatlan and Puerto Vallarta. Typical weather in November and December is low 80s daytime and low 60s at night.

As we came aboard (no, this ex-swabbie didn't have to salute the flag and the officer of the deck) the Vision of the Seas, it was quite an impressive sight. It was huge, all shiny white with blue and red trim, nothing like the dull grey Navy ships of my youth.

There were no big circular steel tubs with 20mm and 40mm ack-ack guns. Instead, I saw several swimming pools, spas, shuffleboard, badminton court, jogging track and outdoor buffet spread. A lively Mariachi band welcomed us aboard.

After we lined up in the main bar area to get our cabin assignments, my spouse told the billeting officer that this was her husband's first civilian cruise. She reported that I had to be dragged aboard shaking with fear because of my record of seasickness during Navy days.

While I fidgeted in shame, the officer slapped me on the back, and laughingly told me, in a clipped, patronizing British accent, not to be afraid of seasickness. He explained that the ship's stabilizer system made it as steady as a rock, even in the roughest seas, and old salts like me had nothing to worry about.

Actually, I had never been seasick through two wars, air raids, bombardments and many heavy storms. Just as I was considering slugging the guy, he handed us a chit that upgraded us to a balcony suite.

Listed at \$1,200, it was almost twice the price and three times the size of the oceanview cabin we had booked. No extra charge, and he gave me the usual "thank you for your service to America" salute as we left. I didn't slug him.

What can I say about the cruise? It was grrrreat! The food? I gained at least a pound a day due to the big meals, snacks and midnight buffets. We enjoyed Broadway/Vegas types of shows. My spouse and I danced to Big Band tunes. I won \$150 at the casino's blackjack table, then lost \$200 at video poker.

Visits to the Mexican Riviera resort towns were enjoyable. My spouse speaks fluent Spanish, and had fun bargaining with the street vendors. We had been warned not to buy displayed food from vendors nor drink unbottled water. We obeyed the rules and rode out the cruise without any sickness.

The seven-day cruise was great for we oldsters, who wanted quiet, interrupted only by dining, gambling and dancing. Would this old swabbie recommend Royal Caribbean? You bet your royal butt I would!