

PANAMA CRUISE

Friday 18 April 2008

A couple of days previously our elderly, Church Warden neighbours invited us round for coffee to chat about holidays. I said to Rick that we must be really retired now for him to agree to this but it turned out to be an enjoyable and interesting morning. Whilst working for Shell, Geoffrey and Ena had lived and brought up their family in many countries and some 20 years ago they bought a couple of timeshares that they swapped very successfully for different places, many of them being in the US. They had some great photos of the Galapagos Islands which we are visiting with Jen in June. All their photos were well documented and Geoffrey was able to answer most questions by referring to his holiday card index system!! He then bought out a map of the world that was covered in colour coded pins to indicate all the places they had visited. Don't worry I am not going to go that far, the blog and photos are enough!! It was all very proper until he had to get Ena to release his trousers that had got caught on the wicker chair.

Our flight to Miami left from Terminal 5. The new Terminal wasn't very busy, checking in our luggage was quick and there were lots of staff there to help direct you; we had to take a satellite train to our gate. Most of the shops were upmarket and they didn't seem very impressed when I asked if they had a "Next". It would have been helpful if they had a map to show you where everything was. Rick has, or did have a set of expensive, sound reducing headphones that he was proud of. During the flight as I was getting past his seat on the way to the toilet I got caught up in them and pull off one of the ears, he tried using them by holding the ear but I had also ripped the lead in two, so he had to make do with the crackling BA ones. Whilst waiting for lift-off they asked if there was a doctor on board and this resulted in us having to sit on the plane for 1.5 hours as one of the passengers had fallen and broken her arm. Thankfully, our luggage arrived with us but the taxi driver got lost and we were ages getting to the Sheraton Yankee Trader Beach Hotel.

Saturday 19 April – Fort Lauderdale

Climate subtropical average temperature 32° C in summer and 23° C in winter – pop 155,000



Fort Lauderdale has more than 300 miles of navigable waterways with lots of canals and finger islands winding through the city. We took the water taxi to experience the "Venice of America", passing waterfront homes, many being valued at over a £5m + dollars and a few as much as \$35m dollars. At one of the homes where they were going to hold a wedding reception for the daughter they went out and stocked their pond with \$5000 worth of fish which were promptly eaten by the pelicans. There were so many amazing yachts, one was sold last year for \$93m and re-sold at an enormous profit some months later. We walked back the length of the Las Olas Boulevard that is full of trendy and touristy shops, upmarket boutiques, eclectic art galleries, restaurants and cafes. We had a great lunch in one of the restaurants along the beach. They all seem to have live music and were buzzing with activity. A pigeon got hit by one of the ceiling fans that threw it across the restaurant where it landed with a thud near to us. There were feathers everywhere and it somehow dragged itself to our table where it promptly dropped dead. We had lunch with a dead bird under our table. Had a couple of hours relaxing by the swimming pool and then took the water taxi in the other direction past an undeveloped area and onto the more popular restaurants like Shooters. There were signs to watch out for the manatee's and nesting turtles. We ate at one of the noisy beach restaurants again with

Spanish music and dancing. One of the waiters kept getting up to dance, he was absolutely fantastic and then the barman got on stage and vibrated his bottom for ages, it was quite something!



There was a real holiday atmosphere, the beaches and restaurants were packed. Everyone is so polite and well behaved even though there is a drinking culture here that we haven't seen before in the States. Most tables have people drinking huge cocktails and it is common to see a bottle of wine being served instead of the usual glass of wine. You were even allowed to drink on the water taxi but not on the beach. An ice cream van went by us driven by a real dude playing loud music, every now and again, to everyone's amusement he would pump the brakes to make the van rock to the music. Fantastic cars, loads of Masarrti's, Porsche's, BMW's, Mustang's everywhere.

Sunday 20 April – Aboard Celebrity Cruises Millennium



Gunboat escorting us out of the harbour

Boarding the ship with about 2000 passengers wasn't as bad as first feared but it's a lot of people and a big ship. We thought we would try an inside cabin this time and it's not bad, even has a 6ft bed, a wall of mirrors and a mini bar. Our stateroom attendant is an Indian called Lourenco. Had a quick look around and started with the gym and beauty area. Everyone seems to be trying to sell you something; most of the activities I am interested in are at an extra cost. It's all a bit glitzy and the staff are made up of many different nationalities. You have to pass through the shops and casino on your way to the main restaurant. – more opportunities to spend money. The casino is quite grand and ornate and I keep rushing Rick through it just in case he gets tempted which I know he will sooner or later. I must have eaten something that didn't agree with me as I spent most of the afternoon in the toilet or asleep but recovered enough to make supper although I wasn't one bit hungry. Our table guests are made up of two Welsh couples with unpronounceable Welsh names and another couple from Newcastle who go out for a curry at least twice a week. The Welshman next to me is a retired postman who is keen to keep chickens but his wife doesn't share his enthusiasm. He is teetotalled and supports Swansea football team. His mate is a rugby fan whose wife didn't say much. The curry eating Newcastle man and his wife have been on lots of cruises and although he is fed up with them he still carries on booking them. Rick keeps trying to influence what I say, he wants me to tell you that he wore his new watch in the swimming pool by mistake and that he forgot his bow tie and The Tie Rack sold him one that they said was self tie but it's a clip on – done my duty.



Monday 21 April – At Sea



The Main Theatre

Main Restaurant

Our cunning plan is that during this cruise we are to eat nothing but healthy foods, drink in moderation and exercise every day. I don't think this is going to happen as most of the main facilities are on decks 3 and 4 but our cabin is on deck 9 and its OK going down but coming up is a killer, so much so that we were too exhausted to make it to the gym today. Got our online credit sorted out and worked out how to send the emails; the computer centre is very good. At midday there was a Port and Shopping Show supposedly to give you all the information about exploring Columbia and Costa Rica. We thought this was a must as we haven't booked any excursions yet and there wasn't any booklet to help. When we arrived the Bingo session hadn't quite finished as the balls had got stuck. We were expecting to see a video of the places we were visiting and some advice on what sort of things the area was famous for producing. You just wouldn't believe what we had to witness – they had lots of prizes to give away such as a 2 for 1 Treatment Voucher – not really a prize as you have to pay for a treatment you probably don't want anyway and suchlike. To win the prize you had to shout as loud and fast as you can “I want to go shopping”. The audience were going mad, jumping up and down and waving their arms about shouting **“I want to go shopping”**. Then when prizes were thrown into the audience he would shout **“Not loud enough”** and they would all start jumping up and down again and shouting like someone possessed. We couldn't stand too much of that and left them to it.



We had a nice afternoon on deck sunbathing and reading by the swimming pool with a reggae band to entertain us. There is no problem getting a sunbed but it's quite windy everywhere as we were going against the wind. It was a formal night and I wore one of my long dresses and Rick wore his white dinner jacket. He was looking very handsome as he has let his hair grow and his curls have come back. The two Welsh ladies Eileen and Linda had a couple of gin cocktails and were quite talkative and merry. They go to the Rugby Six Nations in Rome every other year all dressed up and carrying big blow-up daffodils etc. The two men have good singing voices and are keen to take part in the Karaoke. They had all been to dancing lessons that afternoon and had learnt the waltz, I would like to do that but Rick isn't keen perhaps he would if Mike and Thyra were with us. There then followed a long discussion about how wonderful their grandchildren were, they are all grandparents even the curry eating Newcastle couple. All the men were boasting how they could change nappies and isn't it good now we have disposal ones. Rick was getting beside himself with this sort of talk and wanted to talk about chickens and computers so we left as soon as we could. The food is OK but nothing special. We went to the theatre to meet the Captain who introduced the Senior Officers who were mostly Greek. We then tried to watch a Broadway Show but kept falling asleep. We huffed and puffed our way up to our cabin which incidentally is completely at the other end of the ship. Rick said he would go down and send the emails and came back a little while later completely breathless after climbing all those stairs and running all along the corridors. This didn't stop him making a visit back down to Deck 3 to the Casino, he wasn't gone long though as it eats up your money and his new system he was dying to try out obviously didn't work.

Tuesday 22 April – At Sea



Went through all the trips on the TV to try and sort one out for Cartagena but they didn't give enough detail and you had to wait ages until it came round again as they were showing trips for the whole cruise. Went down to the cruise excursion desk where they gave us a booklet. Some were already sold out and the two that we had earmarked were cancelled through lack of support. A lot of them were totally inappropriate for the age of the passengers i.e. surfing, horseriding, river rafting, diving and one where you had to hold onto a wire and absail over a valley. I suppose these are aimed at the cruises with children. Made our way to a lecture "Christopher Columbus, the REAL story" but it was absolutely packed and was standing room only with all the doors open. Stayed for about 20 minutes but it was hot, difficult to see and my back started to ache from the standing. Also, I didn't hear anything I didn't know already as I read up on him during the last cruise. We then made our way to the cookery demonstration in the Olympic speciality Restaurant. The restaurant décor is based on the dining room in the Titanic and you have a 5 course meal prepared at your table at an extra cost of \$30 per person or \$60 per person to include 5 glasses of wine. Once again the demonstration was oversubscribed and we had to stand but basically they were just trying to sell places at the restaurant. However, Rick was quite taken and said we must do this to escape all that nappy talk. Typed up my diary and then it was lunch time, almost got roped into the Texas Line Dancing as there was plenty of space there but Rick made a quick exit!! Spent a pleasant afternoon by the pool in the shade being entertained by the Reggae Band who Rick thinks are very good - there were some people dancing. Finished my Wilbur Smith book "The Quest". Unfortunately, once again I wasn't well. I think they must be using MSG in the dressings and perhaps I just haven't been careful enough with my choices and there is some hidden wheat. I spent the whole evening in the cabin but Rick didn't mind too much as he escaped the nappy talk and went to the café where they have an Asian counter. We saw the captain there at lunchtime with a plate piled high and Rick said he was also there that evening, no wonder he is so big – the captain that is. I slept off the sickness, Rick wanted me to go to the sick bay but if they find out you are sick they will think it is the sickness you catch on a boat and you have to stay in your cabin for 3 days to stop it spreading. Never did get the trip for tomorrow sorted out and apparently Cartagena, Columbia is a dangerous place to go out alone.

Wednesday 23 April – Cartagena – weather today 29° C Partly Cloudy

I was up at 5am having been in bed since 6pm the previous evening. When Rick woke up he said he was looking forward to going home, it's all too American, not like the Marco Polo. Also, as there is nobody feeding the ducks they might go and make their nest elsewhere. I needed to take control so I said lets be lazy and take the lift to the 3rd floor and try to sort out a trip for today. They didn't open until 7am but we managed to sort out something for the afternoon which was good as it left the morning free to relax. I kept fidgeting and interrupting Rick who is reading a book on Mugabe. Did you know that he took an additional 3 university degrees whilst he was in prison for 11 years, although I expect he bought the other 3. Rick did 30 minutes in the gym. I didn't go as I wanted to be prepared for our trip and it was cutting it a bit fine. Got to the coach and Rick confessed he had come out without any money or credit cards.



Fort San Felipe de Barajas



Good set of wheels

We spent a very pleasant, humid afternoon in Cartagena (pop1m) and having no money didn't prove a problem as they gave us a bottle of water and we could look the street vendors in the eye and tell them we weren't interested without feeling guilty. Cartagena was founded in 1533 by the Spanish and was a major trading port for gold, silver and emeralds; it was also a slave port. The fame of this prosperous city made it a target for pirate attacks one of which was by Sir Francis Drake. A wall that took 194 years to complete was built around the city to defend it against the attacks and the streets were made narrow and crooked, in addition many forts were also built. Our first stop was at the Fort of San Felipe de Barajas and then we walked around the walled city spending some time at the Inquisition Palace looking at the torture chamber. Many of the buildings that were of a Spanish – colonial style have been restored and had balconies with colourful flowers. There was a real laid-back feeling about the place and someone said it was similar to New Orleans. Of course, no trip ever ends without a visit to the shops and ours was to the emerald shops. One lady tried a ring on that was priced at \$42,000, they came down by half but she didn't buy it. The main shops are in the new part of the city that is full of skyscrapers.



They all seemed pleased to see us back on the table for Dinner, the waiter had organised a specially prepared desert for me. The Welsh contingency were looking very sun burnt and didn't make their Rumba lesson. Eileen was suffering from dry eye and had to pay \$200 to have her contact lenses removed – a 2 minute job. The Newcastle chap doesn't get up until 11am each day – what a waste of a day. All 3 men are retired and aged 60 -65 and look after their grandchildren one or two days a week, all of their wives are still working.

Summary:

Exercise – Rick has been to the gym once but I haven't made it yet. There has been quite a lot of exercise walking from one end of the ship to the other and loads going up and down stairs. However, we did give in today and used the lift a lot as there were several trips down to levels 1 and 3.

Food – Rick is quite taken with the Asian Counter which is fattening and he seems to be eating more than usual but not pigging out. I have tried to eat healthily although I have eaten more than usual but I have been sick on two days.

Alcohol Intake: This is good, we have only had 3 bottles of wine since Friday and just the occasional beer or gin.

Colombia (pop 44m) is part of the Pacific Ring of Fire a region of the world subject to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. The government have begun to implement the Plan Colombia initiative with a dual goal of ending the armed conflict and promoting a strong anti-narcotic strategy. The improved security measures have shown a decrease in reported kidnappings from 3700 in 2000 to 800 in 2005, a decrease of more than 48% homicides and a 50% decrease in insurgents. Columbia's economy is fuelled by abundant natural resources and a highly literate population, over 93% can read and write. Their main exports are manufactured goods, petrol, coal, sugar crops, coffee and unofficially illegal drugs are also a major export. Columbia is one of the largest producers of pop-up books in the world. In 2006 Columbia received 1.5 million international tourists, an increase of 50% from the previous year. Lonely Planet picked it as one of their top 10 destinations. As a result of improved security Caribbean cruise ships now stop in Cartagena and Santa Marta.

Thursday 24 April – At Sea – weather today 29° C Hot

Lourenco, our Stateroom Attendant has a sense of humour. I asked him "Where are our beach towels as we will be charged if they are missing". He said "You are going to beach today?", obviously not as we are in the middle of the ocean. Had a really nice day and perhaps we are settling in. Found a place on deck where we could go in and out of the shade and settled down to a new book "Two Caravans". Just before lunch we went to the gym, this is something new for Rick. The equipment is very sophisticated; it adjusts the program according to your heart rate and targets. He just loves those gadgets and there are plenty of them, he also loves the Asian Food counter. I had booked in at the Spa for a 1.5 hours of pampering. First stop was the Turkish Steam Room which I shared with a huge black man dressed in a tracksuit, woolly hat, gloves and trainers and there I was in my bikini. It turned out he was one of the singers and was sweating out a cold. He said I should look him up in the Rendezvous Bar later that evening, I said he probably wouldn't recognise me with my clothes on but on the other hand I probably wouldn't recognise him with his clothes off. It was hot in that steam room. I then had a body, foot and head massage, facial and conditioning treatment on my hair. It was very relaxing but she couldn't get anywhere with the big sale afterwards except that I should book in for a full body massage as I was full of lactic acid and needed detoxing. After my treatment I presented Rick with a plate full of sandwiches and cakes. Spent the rest of the afternoon reading "Two Caravans". Rick sneaked in another session at the gym and now he is 2 in front of me. We had booked into the posh restaurant where we had to pay an extra \$60 to include 5 glasses of wine. I wore my mauve dress and Rick wore his linen suit. Rick was in his element away from all that nappy talk. The ambiance and service was great – I was even escorted to the loo. I had Asparagus, Fois Gras, Lobster, Scallops, Cheese, Soufflé, canapés and sorbets and other chef's delights in-between – all very nice and romantic. We think maybe we will alternate between the main restaurant, casual one and the posh one as it's a bit much all that nappy talk. It was a lovely, relaxing day but was too tired to make any entertainment after the dinner, don't know how all the others do it. Rick said that I completely passed out

after the meal and he couldn't wake me up but he was very mean and took a dreadful video of me asleep and snoring – gone off him now.



Friday 25 April – Panama Canal - weather today 29° C

We and almost everybody else were up on deck at 7am as we were about to go through the first lock called the Gatun Locks. The Gatun Locks on the Caribbean raise the ship 85 feet up to the level of the Gatun Lake. Our ship was pulled into and through the 1.6 mile lock by cables attached to a train. Once we were through the lock we found ourselves in the middle of a huge lake with lots of islands full of lush, tropical vegetation.



The construction of the canal began by the French in 1880. The diggings were continually flooded and the jungle around them was seemingly impenetrable. Thousands of workers succumbed to yellow fever and malaria. In 1904 disillusioned and bankrupt the French sold their enterprise to the US for \$40 million after they had lost almost \$300 million on the project. The US tried negotiating with Colombia to acquire the rights to build the Canal but reached a deadlock. With the aid of the US a revolution took place and Panama declared its independence. The Canal was finally completed in 1914 and the route from the Caribbean to the Pacific is approximately 50 miles long. Tragically, in the 35 years it took to build the Canal over 25,000 people died from accidents and diseases. Due to Panama's unique geography, there are places in the country where the sun rises over the Pacific and sets in the Caribbean. It cost Celebrity Cruises \$225,088 to go through the canal today.



Rick has a new Sony camera that he took months to choose only to find out that they advertised a new model the day after his arrived. It's one of those big, complicated ones, he's quite into cameras at the moment and this is a good chance to try it out. He stopped to admire someone who had an absolutely enormous lense.

Rick has a strong competitive streak and stupidly I quite often find myself rising to his challenges. We spent a lot of the morning once again fighting over my mobile. Rick always has a Nokia and uses Vodaphone whereas I have been having Samsung's and use Orange. I cracked the screen on my phone and have been having a frustrating time replacing it. At the moment I am waiting for a Nokia 95 which is a better phone than Rick's, also I have been offered a great deal by Orange that he can't get matched. I am using an old Nokia of Jen's until my new one arrives. Rick is always saying he has a stronger signal than me and he is right but the last few days he has had 5 bars and I haven't had any. He keeps wanting to fiddle with my phone and now I have no signal and everything has been put back to factory settings. I am OK with Orange but he thinks I should be with Vodaphone. After the phone episode we went to the gym and of course he does less and burns off more calories than me. I am pleased he has got so interested in the gym but tomorrow I am going to go back to my old routine and not bother to count the calories.

Someone cut their leg in one of the pools and staff appeared from everywhere with a wheelchair and loads of equipment and they had to close that pool afterwards. It has been hot again and we have had a couple of dips in the remaining pool. The Indian man on the Asian counter has got to know Rick and he made me a special rice noodle dish with chicken and vegetables without any soy sauce. It was very tasty and he also added a couple of Indian spicy potato balls. I have started Rick's Mugabe book and I was keen for him to read "Two Caravans" which is funny but also quite shocking in it's descriptions of how many immigrants are taken advantage of. Rick's not really into novels and got a bit moody as he said it was obvious how it would turn out. After laughing at him he has decided to persevere with it but says I mustn't keep telling him what is going to happen, I have only told him bits because I want to encourage him to carry on with it. I went up to our room about 5pm to write up my diary and left him reading it. He came back to the cabin about an hour later all sweating and breathless, he had been to the gym again, now he is 3 sessions ahead of me and he says he is going to start doing press-ups tomorrow.

They didn't miss us in the Dining Room last night as one of the entertainers who is an opera singer joined them. She had a strong Southern American accent and was very talkative and entertaining, they all took a shine to her. They said she ordered all the courses but picked at the food and after a while they forgot about her strong jaw line and big teeth. All the staff are weighed before each cruise and they can lose weight but they are not allowed to put any on. My meal was poor. We talked about pets and gardening and the Welsh postman doesn't like his grumpy neighbour two gardens up so he throws all his slugs that way. In Wales the over 60's and under 5's can travel free on the buses and trains. Went into the Rendezvous Bar to hear Rick the singer that I met in the Turkish Steam Room. He sings with 3 others called "ACappella Sensation The Tonics". They sing without any musical accompanants a bit like the singers on Jonathan Ross .

Saturday 26 April – Panama At Sea - weather today 27° C

I woke up to find that I still have no signal on my phone, I am sure that earlier in the cruise I had a signal from the satellite. I rang Jen on Rick's phone to get her to ring Orange to see if they had put a stop on it, she was annoyed and said I am always going on about my phone. She didn't have much luck as all they would tell her was that I have been enabled to have calls abroad and they gave her a number for me to ring. I had to use Rick's phone once again (he has refused to touch mine after I accused him of messing up my settings) and phoned Orange to ask why Rick has 5 bars and I have none. They don't know, so I will see if I get a signal in Costa Rica tomorrow. I wish he hadn't touched my phone.

Went to the gym twice. We met a nice lady at the wine tasting she was with an American lady who was up for drinking them dry. American's have great white teeth. This was quite a different wine tasting session as we were given a plate with lemon, parmesan cheese, olives, chicken, chicken with pesto and cherry tomatoes. There were 4 glasses of wine and we practiced the complementary principal and the contrast principle. It was surprising the difference it made to the wine by adding lemon juice to the plain chicken. said that as the lemon juice worked so well why don't we just add it to the wine. There was a piece of chocolate that we originally tried with the chardonnay and then tried it with the red Shiraz, not that good but it went really well with the Cabernet Sauvignon. We all got chatting at the end and were the last to leave. Tonight we tried the Free Dining that you have to book in advance at an extra \$2 a head. It was great and the Carol who we met at the Wine Tasting was with her husband on the table opposite us, she is also Gluten Free. The Free Dining is great as you have a table and waiter to yourselves, ours was a Philippino who pronounced the words a bit strange. He read out the specials and we just looked at him for a long time while we worked out what he was saying and he burst out laughing and so did we and then we just laughed every time he said anything. Rick ordered me champagne and wine and we chatted to Carol and Mike across the room. Going to have to go back to our original table tomorrow though as they will think we don't like them.

We had a form today that we could complete for tips at the end of the cruise. They just charge it to your account rather than you give it to them individually. It's a good idea in principle but how sure can you be that they will receive it and will they automatically take the tax out. Here's what they suggest:

Waiter	3.5
Assistant Waiter	2.0
Assistant Maitre D	1.0
Stateroom Attendant	3.50
Assistant Chief Housekeeper	.50
\$10.50 x 15 days = 157.5 x 2 = \$315	



Panama has a population of about 2.3 million people with about half of them living in the Canal zone. Bananas and cacao are grown in the western lowlands while coffee is from the highland areas. Sugar and cattle are predominant on the Pacific coast of the canal. Originally Panama was a province of New Granada and then after being liberated from Spain became part of the new nation Gran Columbia. Grand Columbia was eventually divided into the countries of Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela with Panama gaining independence from Colombia in 1903. The local people became dissatisfied with the treaty and there were

lots of riots in 1963. The US helped rework the treaty and gave control of the zone back in 2000 to the Panamanian government. There is concern that they won't be able to maintain it to the same standards, however work is currently in place to extend the locks to enable larger ships to go through, therefore, increasing revenue.

Sunday 27 April – Puntarenas Costa Rica

Clocks went forward an hour, we are now 7 hours behind GMT

Pop 4.2 million. Costa Rica borders the Caribbean Sea (east) and the North Pacific Ocean (west) and also borders Nicaragua (north) and Panama (south-southeast) and is excellent for whitewater kayaking.



Neither Rick or myself have a signal. It was absolutely baking hot as we left the ship for a walk to the beach at the end of the pier. The beach was crowded with locals and lined with market stalls selling souvenirs, but the people weren't at all pushy. We had our first swim in the Pacific Ocean and it was as warm as a bath. I told Rick to make sure he didn't swallow any of it as I wasn't too sure how clean it was, which of course he promptly did. It was hot and dirty on the sand so we made our way back to the ship as our tour wasn't until after lunch. The first thing that everyone noticed was the amount of litter everywhere. Our guide told us that Costa Ricans are very clean inside their houses but it is their culture just to chuck the rubbish outside, in fact tourists have been told to throw their rubbish out of the coach windows to help keep the coach clean. However, with the increase in tourism, the Government has been putting out TV ads encouraging people to be more responsible with their rubbish. They have to wash their clothes each day and hang them out to dry and then they have to iron them all carefully as they may have picked up insects or worms whilst they were drying.





Our next stop was to board a wooden train that was over 100 years old. The train took us through the plains and jungle where there were families living in makeshift tin and wood houses. The families would all wave and invariably there would also be a skinny dog. It is the mango season and the trees were laden with fruits and lots of them had piles of fruit underneath where there were just too many to pick. It is the end of the dry season and the rainy season starts in May, we saw several forest fires in the distance and evidence of many close by. Everywhere was lined with live tree fences, they just pull off a branch, shove it in the ground and it takes, this is very cheap and also achieves a fast rate of growth. This is the only type of fencing resistant to termites which eat any dead wood. The cashew tree fruit is strange; it is like a small sweet pepper with the nut hanging like a hook below it. The monkeys were having their siesta but we were told that their voices can carry as far as one mile. We travelled through thick jungle, volcanic rocks, over rivers and through plains with thin cows with large double chins hanging loose and locals on bikes and horses. When we went through The Tunnel of Love it was pitch black for quite a while and we all had to make lots of noise so we didn't get up to anything. Costa Rica is home to a rich variety of plants and animals. While the country has only 0.1% of the world's landmass, it contains 5% of the world's biodiversity. About 27% of Costa Rica is composed of protected forests and reserves. There are four mountain ranges that cut through the plains and jungles with three of them being considered actively volcanic. Since Volcano Arenal erupted in 1968 it has been exceptionally active. Its degree of volatility varies from week to week from a gentle glow to spectacular displays of flowing red-hot lava and flying incandescent rocks. Next stop was the Jungle Crocodile Safari on the Tarcoles River where we boarded a boat to search amongst the mangroves for crocodiles and birds. It didn't take long before we spotted our first croc skimming along in the river. There were lots and I have included a picture of the biggest one we saw lurking on a bank. There were loads of birds including Frigate Bird, Brown Pelican, Neo Tropical Cormorant, Rose Spoonbill, White Ibis, Boat billed Heron, Little Blue Heron, Snowy Egret, Cattle Egret, Great Egret, Green Backed Heron, Purple Gallinule, Osprey, Scarlett Macaw, Mangrove Swallow and Red winged blackbird. This was all in a fairly small stretch of river. What a fantastic trip!





Back to our usual table in the restaurant. The Welsh lot seemed a bit downcast and asked us if we were enjoying ourselves. They are comparing it to their last cruise and were a little disappointed especially with the entertainment also they thought that everyone seemed so old. This hasn't really bothered us this time as we got used to that on the Marco Polo and now realise that the older passengers have some great stories to tell. There then followed a conversation about how long each of us have been married. The Newcastle couple have only been married 18 years and I asked them if they had any children together. They haven't and then he got a bit upset and said he had lost both his sons, one from Leukaemia aged 4 and the other committed suicide at 30. There followed an awkward silence but he went on to say that he went to see a medium who said all sorts of things about his son and it gave him strength. The postman has a lot of empathy and as we left the room I noticed he put his arm around his shoulder. Pleased we are going to escape this table again tomorrow as we will be Casual Dining. Looked in on the entertainment in the theatre and it was complete crap.

It's almost 60 years of uninterrupted democracy that makes Costa Rica one of the most stable countries in the South America. It was one of the first countries in the world to constitutionally abolish its army. However, this developing country has the 4th highest inflation rate (14%) in Latin America with over 16% living below the poverty line. The first European to reach Costa Rica was Christopher Columbus in 1502. During Spanish Colonial times the principal city in Central America was Guatemala City. Costa Rica's distance from there made it difficult to establish trade routes and this was one of the reasons why it was left to develop in relative isolation. It also contributed to it being described by the Spanish Government as the poorest and most miserable Spanish colony in all Americas. Also, because there was a lack of indigenous people to use for forced labour many of the Costa Rican settlers had to work their own land. Its economy grew nearly 5% in 2006 after experiencing 4 years of slow economic growth. High levels of education (96%) make the country an attractive investing location. In the last few years electronics, pharmaceuticals, financial outsourcing, software development and ecotourism have become prime industries in Costa Rica's economy. Ecotourism is extremely popular with many tourists visiting the extensive national parks and protected areas. It's a pioneer of this type of tourism and recognized as one of the few with real ecotourism. Tourism now earns more foreign exchange than bananas and coffee combined. Unfortunately, largely because prostitution is not illegal, up to 10% of tourists, mainly American go to Costa Rica and engage in sex tourism.

Monday 28 April - At Sea - Partly Cloudy 28°C

The clocks went forward and now we are back to 6 hours behind GMT. We are on our way to Huatulco, Mexico and the ship is going at full speed as it's almost 800 miles away. Woke up to find Rick has 5 bars again and I have none. I had a massage booked for 10.30 am and the plan was to go to the gym at 7am and breakfast at 9am. Missed the gym bit but had breakfast in the "Healthy Eating" bar. It felt like we were extras' in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" with everyone drifting along to the droning music in the background. As Rick didn't feel satisfied he then went to the usual Breakfast Bar and had scrambled eggs, tomatoes, bacon and sausage followed by a croissant. Passengers are continually being reminded how much weight you can put on during a cruise. Lots of the beauty treatments and lectures are aimed at watching your weight i.e. How to get a flatter stomach, How to eat and still lose weight, Detox to lose weight etc.

There aren't too many places where you can help yourself to food; most of the buffet counters serve the food to you. You are given a minuscule amount of cheese but I suppose you could ask for more or just keep going up. There is a huge choice for breakfast and also several places you can eat in. We prefer the buffet as it is a long drawn out process if you go to the restaurant. Lunch is much the same; there are several buffet counters with separate Pasta, Pizza, Sandwich and Asian counters. You can get hot dogs, burgers and Mexican food by the pool. I think it is the evening meals that aren't so good and there are too many courses. The salad one is not necessary and even if you miss it out you have to wait while everyone else has theirs. I trotted off to my massage at 10.30; however, she didn't seem to remember me and all my lactic acid and toxins. She did give me a good massage but I didn't get the complimentary facial she promised. Spent the rest of the day reading by the pool. About 6pm the wind got up and we had a lively swim in the pool as it was sloshing about. Didn't enjoy our Free Dining so much as our funny Philipino waiter was serving someone else although he did keep trying to chat to us. Our wine waiter Claudia, is from Croatia, most of the eastern block girls wear white uniforms with white stilettos. She is quite a big girl, efficient and very serious. As we finished early we called into the main restaurant to see how the rest of our table were getting on, we were quite missing them. Passing through one of the bars on the way out we saw a couple sitting at the bar with a tray with 6 small cocktail glasses on it. We have seen this before and wondered what it was all about, each glass holds different vodka martini and all for \$9, not bad! George was an ex New York Cop working in the bomb disposal unit, he has also served in Vietnam as a Pathfinder. When he was 42 he was testing some sort of escape system and broke both his ankles jumping out of a helicopter. He then had a pub in New Jersey. A few years ago he spent a fortune on buying a couple of condominiums in Fort Lauderdale, one right next to Shooters. After spending about \$50,000 renovating them he is having to rent them out as he can't sell them. What an interesting guy he was and how once again it makes me think we must give our servicemen more recognition. A very relaxing day but all good intentions have gone to pot (not literally) no visit to the gym and loads to drink, Pina Colada, Margarita, Gin, Champagne and finally the vodka martini's.

Our Table Guests



Nick & Eileen



Linda & Brenton



Mike & Judy

Tuesday 29 April - Huatulco Mexico - 38° C Hot

We had a rough night with the boat swaying a lot and then a dreadful sickly sewerage smell filled the room. The rough sea conditions had affected the pipes and Rick tried to clear them by turning the shower on and off. The swimming pool almost emptied out and the deck was full of water with reduced sugar sachets floating about. The good news is that I have a full signal and am back in touch with the world. It was as I thought all along that Orange don't have any agreement with some of the countries we have been visiting. Rick convinced me it was my sim card and I have had my phone and his phone all apart and made those expensive calls to Orange on his phone.



We didn't really know what to expect from Huatulco and hadn't booked a trip. It has nine beautiful bays and each hides lots of secluded coves and little beaches, some are only accessible by boat. Huatulco's importance early on was a result of its strategic location on the trading route between rival territories. In 1537 with the arrival of Spanish merchant vessels it became an important port for goods traded between Mexico City, Central America and New Spain. The area is undergoing a \$200 million revitalisation as they are expecting it to become a major tourist destination. At the moment it is a quiet, unspoilt, relaxing hideaway. The trees all around the cove appeared to be dead but they will all burst into a red colour when the rainy season starts next month. We declined the water taxi's that could take us to secluded beaches and opted to stay where we were. It was very peaceful with lots of birds singing away. I must start taking proper Spanish lessons as everywhere we have visited on this trip so far speaks Spanish. Different people we have got to know stopped and chatted to us, apparently we are on the Ship's DVD. Nick said he went to look at the photo gallery and there we were, he looked up and there we were on the ship's TV and then he turned his TV on in his room and he was once again faced with us.

Back to the gym and you can tell Rick is new to it as he thinks they have really advanced machines, they even have televisions on them.! We seem to have bonded as a table and I enjoyed the evening although Rick thought it was far too drawn out and he missed the chance to do anything else. The others are right, everything seems to close down about midnight. We stopped by at the shops which are mostly full of expensive jewellery and handbags. The South and Central American countries are big on semi precious stones and try to sell them for a fortune i.e. \$42,000 emerald ring. We asked how much an amber necklace was and I think he said about \$500 and that was because most of the jewellery was discounted by 50%. This seems ridiculous as you could get diamonds for that. He then showed us some diamonds and explained about the different grades. Then he put 2 diamond bracelets of different qualities together to show us the difference. It was quite a surprise but I think if you didn't have one to compare it to you wouldn't really know. Rick was showing a great deal of interest in the expensive bracelet and said we would look in again tomorrow night – sounds promising.

Wednesday 30 April – Acapulco - 29° C

Since Rick retired he seems to need more sleep, I can remember the days or nights when he only needed about 4 hours. It seems to be the opposite for me as now I am awake on and off all night and for good about 5am. It's a long time until about 8am when I think it is reasonable to try and stir him. By 6am I have fiddled about with my diary and prepared myself for the day. About 9am after a lot of moaning from me Rick moves– he just wastes the day and then everything is a rush and he forgets things like the money. Also, it messes up my meals as I like to have them evenly spaced out whereas he just likes to eat when he is hungry and late at night. I always wake up hungry but I suppose I could go down and have breakfast on my own like I do at home. The first thing he usually asks is "Have you got a signal? That really get me going because of course on most days I haven't. He then says "See if I've got one" as if I care, trouble is I always rise to the bait. It's 9.30am now and he has just got up, we dock at 10am and once again have no trip planned. Rick likes it when I write about him even if it is mostly negative.



Note the Yellow Shirt

Our first view of Acapulco was a huge built up bay surrounded by hills. We shared a minibus for a city tour with a very nice Japanese family. They are enjoying the cruise but said they have never seen so many old people and wheelchairs and sticks, this is a bit strange as they are retired themselves. Initially we sat in the back but it was difficult getting in and out of the bus and Rick's back went. This is a great shame as he was uncomfortable for the rest of day. We toured the old town first where hotels and accommodation are a bit run down but full of character and cheap. At one time we could have been in Tenerife as there were signs for Las Americas and La Caletta. The highlight of the tour was a stop at La Quebrada to watch the world famous high cliff divers. On the way up the hill to the cliffs we passed lots of Irish cyclists who were doing a charity bike tour and we mentioned that they would have to be fit to bike up that steep hill. Anyway a dreadful thing happened after reaching the platform to watch the divers, one of them died after they tried unsuccessfully to resuscitate him. We didn't actually see it but our Japanese friends saw it all and it spoilt the diving show for them, also they found it difficult to see through the crowds. We watched it from a restaurant above and the divers including a girl of 12 were very young (one was only 8) and very brave. At one time 3 of them dived off together. The final 3 top divers each wore one of the cyclist yellow shirts as a mark of respect. We were told later that due to the force of entering the sea many of the divers go blind, however, now they periodically have health checks. After the diving we drove through the new district and saw a pink and white hotel where each room has their own swimming pool and pink jeep. Lots of Americans go to Acapulco for a weekend break as there are good beaches and a very exciting night life. .



It's a terrible thing to say but with Rick's back being bad it gave me a chance of catch up with him in the gym. He is now 2 sessions ahead of me and if it is still bad tomorrow I could go twice and then we would be even. Of course, and I not wishing it on him as I know how uncomfortable a bad back is, but if its still bad the next day I would be ahead. Had an enjoyable but not that great meal in the Dining Room, everyone had enjoyed Acapulco and the Newcastle couple are going to go back at sometime. We had another long session in the jewellers. I tried on a beautiful necklace that had matching earrings; it was a one off by a New York designer who cuts the stones in a special way. We were given a price that we thought was for both the necklace and earrings but it was only for the necklace and the earrings were even more. Never mind, Rick is still thinking about the bracelet. There is someone else after it, she has a small wrist and is thinking of having it shortened and making a set of earrings out of the diamonds they take out. I don't really want it as I think I have enough already and we are so lucky being able to have all these holidays.

Thursday 1 May – At Sea 25° Partly Cloudy

Clocks went back another hour not sure where we are with the time now. Can't believe it but I overslept, didn't wake up until 9.30 am although it was 8.30 am new time. We woke at 4am because Rick's back was hurting and he had to take some pills. Had breakfast on deck overlooking the sea with a couple from Atlanta who sit behind us in the Restaurant. They said they have only seen the back of our heads and they liked my curls. This is their 8th Celebrity Cruise and although retired they were very modern but wearing loads of gold. They, like us, prefer the days at sea but I also like the opportunity to visit many countries without having to spend too long there. We kept bumping into Brenton during the day which is funny as we have only ever seen the top half of him. He is always at the table when we arrive and there when we leave, turns out he is quite short. Went to the gym which was busy and because Rick wasn't with me I tried out all the different machines. Had a computer lesson after lunch and there was a man sitting by the door who was asleep when I arrived and still asleep when I left. I don't know if he was supposed to take part in the lesson. The American man in front of me was a bit deaf and kept mishearing her instructions but he did take one too far. She said "put DAY in box A1 that is Delta, Alpha, Yankee" and so he put Delta, Alpha, Yankee in the box and wondered why it overflowed. This is all leading up to the Movie Making course that I am looking forward to. Rick is reading a lot and seems to have forgotten about his gambling. He likes it when I leave him alone when going to the gym or my computer course as it gives him a bit of peace and he can order beers etc. I wonder how the local elections are going, also the London Mayor – I want Boris to win. Rick likes sending his clothes to the laundry but he doesn't send his socks and pants as it will cost more to wash them than they originally cost when he got them from Tesco's. This is the disposable society, bad really. Most of the passengers are American and they are very concerned about the price of petrol, they have nothing to complain about we are the second to Sierra Leone for the most expensive petrol in the world. However, in Venezuela water is more expensive than petrol which is only just over 5p per gallon!! It was free dining for us again and our laughing Philippino waiter was serving a couple from Bristol on the table next to us. He has such a wonderful smile and you can feel his aura, he has spent 6 years training to be a priest. Met up with our New York cop and his partner Mary in the Martini Bar. They both lost their partners a few years ago and they told us how they fell madly in love as soon as they met. We introduced them to our Welsh friends and then we all headed for Cosmos nightclub. I haven't told you but I have been dreaming in Welsh, that is I am speaking with a Welsh accent boyo. They think we are very posh. The nightclub wasn't busy and we didn't dance but we didn't go to bed until gone 1am which is a record for us on this trip.



The smiling Philippino Waiter



Claudia the Wine Waiter from Croatia
Doesn't usually smile, very efficient, Rick think she would whip her boyfriend if he doesn't conform

Friday 2nd May - Cabo San Lucas Mexico

Ordered room service for 7am as I thought it would be nice to wake up to a cup of tea. Didn't fancy it one bit as I also ordered scrambled egg and prune juice and I had a bit of a hangover. Left Rick in bed while I went to the gym, I am now even but want to get at least one session ahead of him. Bad news is that we have one day less than we thought because we fly out one day and don't get back until 1pm the following day. The good news is that I won't have to wear the same dress twice. In the mornings our Turkish Waiter from the evening restaurant is usually serving on deck at the back of the ship and he likes to fuss around us. I feel embarrassed with all the attention. Another waiter had gone downstairs to get me my gluten free toast and they are all fighting to serve us. Sarah from Chile, our lovely Assistant Waiter also came out to say hello. When we were in Acapulco she came up to us waving like mad but we didn't recognise her as she had her hair down. She introduced us to her handsome British (I think) husband who also works on the ship but behind one of the bars. We have to tender out to the beach but it is chaos as the sea is rough. "Ladies and Gentleman this is your Captain speaking I have been given permission to lift our anchor and move further inshore to avoid the difficulties we are facing with the swells." Every day at midday he gives his message "Ladies and Gentlemen, This is your Captain, I have a very important announcement for **your**" He then goes on to give the sea and weather temperatures and our position. He is not like our Captain on the Marco Polo who would go on about the clouds and how wonderful our world is and how he feels at one with the sea and sky and then he would conclude with a romantic poem. No, this Greek Captain is straight forward, like Claudia.

Cabo San Lucas is at the end of the southern most tip of the 1000 mile Baja California desert peninsula with 2000 miles of sandy beaches. The ship anchored opposite the famous Los Archos, a dramatic rock monument that arches starkly out of the sea and Lovers Beach, one of the few beaches in the world ,that shares 2 seas, the Sea of Cortez and the Pacific Ocean where there is a sea lion colony. The view from the ship was a long stretch of sand with lots of building work in process; it looked like a new resort. We originally didn't think we would bother to go ashore as we hadn't booked a trip and because of the rough sea there was a backlog of people waiting go. I am really pleased we did as on the way to the harbour we saw a couple of seals but we missed the whale season as that runs from December to March. There were loads of pelicans. As we entered the harbour there opened up a modern holiday resort and marina. After a look at some of the shops and scenery we stopped for a beer and Margarita and watched the world go by. Some Mexican girls of about 8 did a good sales job on us even to putting their heads to one side and saying "please". San Lucas is really geared up to the Tourist industry with loads to do i.e. fishing (more than 800 species of fish), snorkelling, kayaking, horse-riding, parasailing, surfing, canopy adventure (travel along a 800 foot zip line, underwater sea scooters, diving, 4 x 4 desert safaris, Mexican cooking demonstrations, Tall Ships for Pirate adventures and glass bottom boats.





Back on the ship we usually alternate between two sunbeds, one in the shade and one in the sun. Dozing off on my bed in the sun I was woken up by someone letting out an enormous fart and thought to myself this is really getting a bit much, its bad enough having to put up with the snoring. Shortly after Rick joined me and said that he let one go when he bent down to sort out his sunbed but thinks he got away with it. Ha ha I don't think so. A cold northerly wind started up once we set sail and Rick thought his back was ok for the gym. I had done a full work out earlier but I couldn't let him get ahead of me on sessions so I had to suffer it all again. Before dinner we made our way to the Martini Bar, wish we had discovered it earlier. Every one had enjoyed Cabo San Lucas but Nick said that Swansea was just as good to which Rick replied "You mean it's really hot in Swansea?" Earlier Nick and Eileen couldn't open their safe and when one of the staff had no luck with the magic numbers he called for reinforcements, and this went on for some time until they had to take the safe out, then someone came along with a drill and when that didn't work along came someone else with a bigger drill. Eventually they had 7 seven member of staff squashed in their cabin. Brenton and Linda next door could hear all the banging and noise and wondered what on earth was happening. They are noticing my mimicking of their accent and think it is funny, I am not doing it on purpose it just keeps happening. Had another look at the bracelet. Left Rick on the Roulette table and amazingly he came back saying he was \$20 up.

Saturday 3rd May – At Sea 15°C

The first thing we noticed was that it was cold and most people were wearing a fleece or jacket. We have two days at sea before we dock at San Francisco to take the plane home on Monday evening. What a busy day I have had, gym followed by 3 computer lessons, a tour of the galley and then a detox treatment. Rick spent nearly all day by the pool as he managed to find a sheltered spot to soak up the last of the sun, order beers and read his book. He said they had a very funny "Name That Tune" for the Brits and instead of naming the tune they got carried away and sang the whole thing. The tour of one of the galleys was interesting, we have always been curious how they manage to cater for almost 3000 people. During an average 2 week cruise 18,500lbs of beef, 5000 lbs of lamb, 4520lbs of pork, 4500 lbs of veal, 1600 lbs of sausages, 6000 lbs of chicken, 2200 lbs of duck, 5000 lbs of turkey, 12,000 lbs of fish, 800 lbs of crab, 1300 lbs of lobster are consumed. Not as much alcohol is drunk as I would have expected: 6000 bottles of wine, 350 bottles of champagne, 200 bottles of gin, 450 bottles of vodka, 400 bottles of whiskey, 220 bottles of rum, 65 bottles of sherry, 750 bottles of liquers and 18500 bottles/cans of beer. Most of the staff work 8 months and then have 2 months off, they work long hours and share 2 to a room.

The same man slept though all three computer sessions today, I have found out that he has Alzheimer's, it is very sad but he just sleeps whilst his wife attends the lessons.

It was a Formal Night, I wore my long green dress and after a visit to the Martini Bar we ate in the posh Olympic Restaurant. We went completely over the top with the booze as Rick decided to order wine by the glass to match each course, one glass alone cost \$24. They are overly attentive but our waiter from Peru, who walks like he has something stuck up his bottom, failed to point out what I could and couldn't eat. When we mentioned this to the Head Waiter he tried to squirm out of it. Anyway, it was a fabulous meal and Rick said he was getting used to this and wasn't in any hurry to get home. What about our ducks and all my seeds, can't wait to see how much they have grown. Now was a good time to take him to have another look at the bracelet. It was party time in the main restaurant, they were serving lobster, but unfortunately Linda wasn't well so there were only four of them. At 11pm they had a food feast with lots of ice carvings and elaborate food displays. People were tucking in but I wasn't one bit hungry as we had only just finished our meal. Actually made it to the theatre and watched and enjoyed, while Rick slept, a colourful and professional performance by some Opera singers. A lady stopped us and remarked how handsome Rick looked in his white dinner jacket. I left Rick on his way to the Casino, he came back very late \$50 up, or so he says. He is convinced that he will eventually be able to work out a winning formula. Last full day tomorrow, it may have taken a while but we are enjoying it. PS Rick sneaked an extra session in at the gym while I was being detoxed, we are now even. Thyra won't believe how much he has changed as he is now drinking diet coke, eating brown bread, pasta and muesli and going to the gym, hopefully, soon he won't moan about cold plates.

Sunday 4 May – At Sea - 11°C Rain

Yes, you have read the temperature correctly, it's very cold and the bikini's are replaced by jackets and fleeces. The swimming pool attendants are handing out blankets instead of towels. As nobody was sitting outside it was hard to find somewhere to sit at breakfast. They are selling fleeces at half price and doing a roaring trade. Have made my first movie and can't wait to try it out with my own photo's and that should bore everyone. Just caught the end of a session where they were reciting the most asked questions, here are some of my favourites:

Whilst we were all checking in at Port Everglades a very irate man was telling Guest Relations that he had been promised a room with a balcony and a view but all he has got is a view of the Terminal and Parking Lot. He was told to give them an hour and they would be able to sort it.

Does the ship supply all its own power?

Do they use sea water in the pool? Yes they do "Ah, that explains why it's a bit choppy in there".

Do all the crew sleep on board?

What altitude are we?

We are I probably the lowest of low cabins, an inside one but there are 2 Penthouse Suites: 1432 sq ft stateroom, 1098 sq ft veranda. Features: foyer, separate living and dining areas; baby grand piano; butler's pantry; master bedroom with king size bed, exercise equipment; dressing room with vanity; marble master bath with whirlpool tub; separate shower; powder room with shower; motorized draperies; lights and security system; 2 interactive audio/visual entertainment systems with TV's and VCR's; outbound fax, veranda with whirlpool, wet bar and lounge seating.

We bought the bracelet. They put my name in the shopping raffle and there we were shouting along with all the others "I WANT TO GO SHOPPING" and I won a prize "An Irish Christmas" with Tommy Sands CD, One of the Japanese ladies we went on the trip with won the first prize. Back to the Martini Bar where all the interesting people hang out, especially the smoking side. The barman is clever, he throws the drinks in the air and does all sorts of acrobatic things with them. Dinner was great fun and there was lots of email address exchanges. Have to be up early so I left Rick at the Casino.

Here are a few interesting facts about the Pacific Ocean, **you can skip these if you don't like boring details.** The Pacific Ocean is the largest of the major oceans covering over one third of the earth's surface.

It covers an area of approximately 64 million square miles and its deepest depth is about 36,000 feet. It's the oldest of the ocean basins with rocks dated about 200 million years old. A feature of the basin and rim are the plate tectonics, a coastal shelf that extends to depths of 600 feet. The shelf is narrow along North and South America and very wide along Asia and Australia. The East Pacific Rise extends about 6000 miles from Antarctica to the Gulf of California and rises about 7000 feet above the ocean floor. Also, along the East Pacific Rise are molten rock upwells, these add crust to the Pacific and Nazca plates on both sides of the rise. These plates are instrumental in causing earthquakes and volcanoes, giving the Pacific basin the name "Ring of Fire". Earthquakes are more common in the "Ring of Fire" than volcanic eruptions. The earth's rotation along with wind friction are the main impetus for the ocean currents. Surface currents of the North Pacific (the Pacific is divided into two sections – North Pacific and South Pacific) consist of two circular systems, the counterclock-wise Subarctic Gyre and North Central Gyre. The Subarctic Gyre contains the westward-flowing Alaska Current and eastward-flowing Subarctic Current. The North Central Gyre is the more dominate of the two encompassing the North Pacific Current, which flows east, the California Current, which flows west, and the Japan Current which flows north up the coast of Japan. The wind system of the Pacific are the twin belts of westerlies which blow from the west, one in the northern hemisphere and the other in the southern hemisphere. The winds ill vary depending on the season. Between the westerlies are steady trade winds that move from the east in the northern hemisphere and from the west in the southern hemisphere. Hurricanes in the southern and eastern Pacific will originate in the trade wind belt in late summer and early autumn. The Pacific has two types of tides, diurnal tides and mixed tides. The diurnal tides have a once-a-day cycle while the mixed tides have two high tides with a slight low tide between them and followed by a deep low. Mixed tides are common along the western coast of the U.S. The ship is now going to make its way to Alaska, a bit too early in the year if the last couple of days temperatures are to go by.

Monday 5 May – San Francisco

Miles travelled	Cartagena, Columbia	1141
	Panama Canal	271
	Puntarenas, Costa Rica	488
	Huatulco, Mexico	784
	Acapulco	252
	Cabo San Lucas	685
	San Francisco	<u>1142</u>
		4753 Nautical Miles

1 Nautical Miles = 1.15 land miles

It was chilly but bright in San Francisco. Had a 4 hour city tour before being dropped off at the airport. There was a Greek girl and her boyfriend on the coach and when we were asked to get off in order of seats to void congestion she protested loudly saying "I am young and fit and can run, I don't want to wait for all these old people to get out first". Needless to say that all us "oldies" weren't prepared to give her an easy time after that remark. San Francisco was great, did all the usual sights including the colony of smelly, entertaining sea lions who are the occasional Sunday lunch for the waiting White Sharks nearby. In August we are returning to San Francisco during our Pacific Coast Highway trip with our Route 66 friends. Before that in June we are visiting the Galapagos Islands with Jen. Rick was very jet lagged when we got home last night and I woke him up to say that Mike was bringing the rotivator back Wednesday night. He was completely out of it and said "How did you get in touch with him as you haven't any bars on your phone". It's nice to be back home, everything has grown so much and the wisteria looks wonderful. The male duck is still there, hopefully the female one is sitting on her eggs. Rick managed to sneak a gym session in today so he is now one up!!!!