



*Welcome to Robb's Manor*  
Pete & Mary Clukey

## Cruise 2009 Trip Report

### **Saturday, April 4, 2009 – ATL to Tampa**

We decided to leave around 8am. Joining us on this vacation are other members of the Sea Turtle Dive Club. And today we will be car pooling with Cooter and her son Andrew. Mary drove the whole way down to Tampa. Traffic in ATL was heavy with about an hour delay of stop and go traffic. Yuk.

Once clear of ATL it was pretty smooth cruising in heavy traffic until Macon where we stopped for shopping and some lunch. On the loop around Macon is a dive shop that Mary & Pete have always wanted to stop at. It has a big billboard on the highway advertising the largest dive shop in the South. So, we just had to pop in for a look around. We didn't buy anything but we did pick up several flyers for some of their future dive trips. We asked the staff at Divers Supply where was a good place locally for lunch. They directed us to J & L BBQ. Our original plans were to stop in Valdosta for lunch, but the congestion we encountered in ATL would make that a very late lunch. We easily found J & L with the directions that we were given. It was tasty & quick, just what we were looking for.

Back on the road again and fairly quickly we ran into some more stop and go traffic around some construction. So, Pete consulted the GPS & the maps and found a nice little diversion around the mess.

With all of the delays we didn't arrive in Tampa until after 7pm. Boy was Mary tired. After checking into the Westshore Double Tree, we made a quick trip to the WalMart (just down the street and around the corner) to pick up a few things that were forgotten. Andrew was the smart one and stayed back at the hotel to make use of the pool. We still hadn't had dinner, and it was late. Mary was getting desperate. Just inside the WalMart was a Subway, and that's where we ate dinner. Their meatball sub is pretty good, especially when it's late and you're starving.

Back at the hotel we left all of our bags (except our overnight bag) in the van for the night. We watched a little TV and then fell asleep. We choose the Double Tree because they have a "Cruise & Park" package. All you have to do is stay at least one night and you can leave your vehicle in their covered parking garage while you are on your cruise. Not having to pay extra for parking was very nice, the extra bonus of the package is that they will shuttle you back and forth to the cruise terminal on the days that you depart and arrive. The amenities at the Double Tree were pretty nice too... shampoo, conditioner, facial wash, face lotion SPF45, and body lotion.

### **Sunday, April 5, 2009 – Tampa Aquarium & Cruise embarkation**

We had set our alarms for around 7am. We wanted to get to the Aquarium, which is right across from the cruise terminal, around 9:30am when they opened. We got up and went to check out the breakfast at the hotel. It was not included in the rate and it was too expensive, since we were not that hungry. So, we opted for some Cheese Nips and a Sprite from the hotel gift store.

Soon, it was time to go to the Aquarium. All of our luggage for the four of us (Cooter, Andrew, Pete & Mary) was loaded into the Double Tree's shuttle and off we went. The driver was able to drop us

off right in front of the Aquarium, while other shuttles were being diverted to drop off their passengers across the street from the chaotic cruise terminal area. Our driver did have to double park to unload our baggage, but it didn't take us long. As soon as the van doors opened a porter came over to get our luggage and whisk it away to the ship. Yay, free of most of our luggage (we had just our backpacks). We thought that we would have to store it at the Aquarium until after our visit. The Aquarium has a room where they will store your luggage during your visit. It is not secured in any way, nor are there any checks to make sure that you only take your stuff, it's pretty much the honor system. So, we kept our valuables with us during our visit.

The Aquarium was great. We were able to catch a couple of shows. The first show was funny. There was a birthday party going on for a little girl and it was almost Easter, so the Easter Bunny made a special appearance at the main tank. Yup, they had a SCUBA diver dressed in a bunny suite. He held up a special birthday card and had the entire birthday party get up in front of the tank for a special photo opportunity for the parents. It really was quite cute. And you should have seen those kids react when the large green moray eel started swimming right towards the Easter Bunny. The next "show" that we came upon was the stingray feeding; a staff member fed the stingrays while giving a nice talk and answering questions about stingrays. There were a lot of nice displays in this aquarium. At one point the path leads you through a wetland, where there are no barriers between you and the birds. Mary was able to get some close up photos of a spoonbill and some ducks.

We left the Aquarium around 11:30 to board the ship. Tampa Port Authority & Carnival really put the other ports to shame. We were on the ship and at the buffet line by 12:15! After a leisurely lunch, it was close enough to 1:30pm to see if our cabin was ready. Not only was our cabin ready, but all our luggage was waiting for us. We were sneaky this trip and brought on in our checked baggage some beer (in cans) and two rum runner flasks (one with rum, the other whiskey). The beer was smuggled mixed in with 4 cases of soda, some caffeine free Diet Coke, Canada Dry ginger ale, and Squirt (good for making whiskey sours). Carnival "rules" allow passengers to bring onboard a reasonable amount of nonalcoholic beverages. As far as we know, Carnival never opened our bags to inspect the contents.

Since our bags had arrived we unpacked. Pretty soon we met our cabin steward. We showed him our cooler and he said that he would keep it full of ice. And he did a mighty fine job with the ice all week long.

We hung out on our balcony, until it was time for the mandatory muster drill at 3:30. We were warned that the alarm was quite loud. So, being on the balcony made it much more of a pleasant experience. We were one of the last ones to show up at our station and thus were in the front row. That is something we learned on our last big cruise, don't be in a hurry to be first to the drill, you are lined up in rows, those showing up first are in the back with no fresh breeze. The muster drill last only about 15 – 20 minutes. Back to the cabin to ditch the life vest, hopefully we won't need those for the sail away party.

By the time we get to our room, we are already pulling away from the pier. We make our way up to the top deck and enjoy our voyage down the river towards the Skyway Bridge and the open ocean. It takes about 2 hours to get to the Skyway Bridge and everyone is up top to watch as we go under. There is about 15 feet of clearance but it certainly doesn't look like it.

We spend a little time exploring the ship before dinner. We have the late seating at 8:15pm. The menu is set up a little different on Carnival than on our last cruise with Celebrity. On Celebrity there were 3 appetizers, 3 soups, 2 or 3 salads, and 3 entrees to choose from, all listed under separate headings. The menu on Carnival has only two sections: the first being the appetizers which lists the appetizers, soups & salads, and then the main course section. In between our main course and

dessert, Carnival's dining staff does a little "showtime" entertainment. It's a bit hokey, but fun and this is after all Carnival the "fun ships". The dessert listing seems a little more limited on Carnival and they don't bring a tray of desserts by the table for you to make your selection. But Carnival makes up for any shortfalls by the size of their desserts and their chocolate melting cake. On Celebrity Mary would almost certainly order two or three desserts, they were small. On Carnival, one chocolate melting cake was all that was needed, until the next night. Sadly we just are not impressed by our table wait staff, and if it does not improve we will ask the Maitre'd to move us to another table.

Dinner lasted until almost 10pm... and by that time we were just too stuffed and tired to think about doing anything like attending the nightly show. So, back to the cabin and an early evening for us. Our room steward has refilled our ice bucket & our cooler, and left us a towel animal. We are very pleased with our cabin steward.

### **Monday, April 6, 2009 – At Sea**

Uh oh, Mary woke up with a really sore throat today. It was so bad that she stayed in bed pretty much all day long. Pete was real sweet and stayed close by on the balcony reading. Around lunch time, Mary was not feeling any better, so she made the decision to see the ship's physician because in order to file a claim against the insurance for the prepaid diving excursions, that she believes she will be missing, a note from a doctor is necessary. The ship has a physician who is on duty almost all day... it just so happens that today the hours are from 8am to 1pm and then again from 4pm to 8pm. Well, there is not enough time for Mary to shower and look presentable before the office closes at 1pm. So, she tells Pete that she's going back to bed and please wake her around 3:30pm so that she can get in to see the doc at 4pm. It was a very pleasant visit with the physician. First, there was no one else in the waiting room... not like our HMO doctor's office. Second, the check in form was only a single page, short & concise. Thirdly the receptionist/nurse was friendly and seemed to truly care about Mary's condition. The receptionist first checked Mary's temperature and it was normal, this was really good news. From that point, Mary didn't even wait 5 minutes before the doctor arrived to check on her throat. We always take antibiotics with us just incase something like this happens while we are out of the county, so Mary asked if she should start taking those antibiotics. The doctor told Mary that it might just be a cold coming on and just give it a few days to get better on its own, and if it's not better come back to see him to get something that will better target her symptoms.

Sadly tonight was the Captains reception and the first cruise elegant (dress up) evening. And for dinner, lobster was on the menu... but Mary was not up to a public appearance, so we stayed in our cabin tonight.

What a day! We didn't even take a single picture all day. Too bad too, because the visit to the ship's doctor is certainly something we've never done before (and hope never to have to again).

### **Tuesday, April 7, 2009 – Grand Cayman**

Mary is feeling better, but after not eating most of yesterday she is not up to today's diving excursion. Pete wanted to stay onboard to take care of Mary, but Mary told him to go diving, she has a whole ship full of crew members to take care of her... room service is just a phone call away and she is really feeling much better. Pete reluctantly leaves to go scuba diving. We had all of our SCUBA diving prearranged for this trip through shoretrips.com.

Mary spends a leisurely day on a ship mostly empty of passengers. Today turned out to be a pivotal point in the cruise. Our biggest complaint about our last cruise was the lack of cruise staff from the islands. Well, today Mary met Clyde from Grenada at breakfast. And from this point forward, whenever having breakfast she was sure to sit at one of Clyde's tables. As it turns out there are at

least three servers from the “islands”; Panama, Jamaica, and Grenada. OK, so Panama isn't an island. Still it was fun to listen to the three of them talk back and forth with their accents... reminds us of the days of Windjammer Barefoot Cruises.

After breakfast, Mary took her camera topside. It was another beautiful sunny day. Mary took pictures of Grand Cayman from the Lido deck of the Legend. She actually contemplated going ashore for a bit of window shopping on her own but instead decided to go exploring the ship before taking an afternoon nap. Mary took lots of pictures of the ship today.

Mary was just settling in for a nap when Pete came back from diving. And he had a unique souvenir, welts from a jelly fish sting. Pete reported that the diving was pretty nice. The first dive was to just over 100 feet in crystal clear water on a wall. It was nice but lacked fish. It was on the first dive that he got stung and during the surface interval the crew provided him a jug of vinegar & a rag to doctor the welts. There was an incident worth reporting on during the first dive, one of the divers ran out of air and had to buddy breath on the way up. This diver was a youngster in our group, and he notified the dive leader of his air consumption at 1500 psi (half tank), 1000 psi, and again at 500 psi. The dive leader did not begin the ascent at the appropriate time. A formal complaint has been filed against this operator.

The rest of the afternoon was spent lounging in our room and on our balcony.

Mary decided that she did not want to put up with bad service at dinner, so we spoke with our Maitre'd and got our whole group moved to another table. What a difference! Service with a smile and both our new waiter and his assistant had great personalities too.

Again after dinner, we are too stuffed and tired to think about doing anything like attending the nightly show.

### **Wednesday, April 8, 2009 – Cozumel**

Today we (yes we, Mary is feeling fine) are diving in Cozumel. We get up early enough to grab a quick bite to eat at the breakfast buffet. Wouldn't you know it; Clyde is on break, so Mary can't introduce him to Pete today.

We are to meet Shane and Cooter on the pier just after getting off the ship. Then we will catch a taxi to the marina. We get off the ship and wait in the shade for the gang. Soon we spot Shane, but after waiting 5 minutes, no Cooter. Cooter is always on time so she must be waiting in another spot. Yup, as soon as we start to think about looking for her closer to the pier exit Mary spots her walking back towards us from that area.

Now that the gang is all together we make our way through the maze out of all of the shops to where we can get a taxi. There is a sign with the fare amount to many locations. We double check this against what we were told by our travel agent and they match. The only thing that they don't tell you is that is the price for a car... and with all of our gear we think that we may need a van to take us... and the price for the van is twice as much. To our surprise they wedge all of our gear into the trunk, secured with a bungee cord, of a single car. So for \$10 we all get to cram into one car and get whisked away (all of 5 minutes) down the road to the marina.

We are the first group to show up for dive, we are actually about an hour early before our departure time. So, we get our gear stored on the ship. Soon tanks are loaded and Shane & Cooter begin to set up their BCD on the tank. We are renting BCDs & regulators, and those aren't on board yet, so we just enjoy the view. When our gear arrives, the crew sets up our tanks, all we have to do is verify

that everything is connected and working properly. They plan on taking out 6 more divers with us today. The boat isn't that big. With 2 crew and 10 divers, there won't be much elbow room. We're in luck the other six divers don't show up by the departure time and the crew departed promptly on time.

Both dives were quite nice leisurely drift dives. We did spot a lot of tiny reddish jelly fish during the entry & exits, but they didn't seem to sting. Our dive leader, Oswaldo, did a great job checking on everybody and keeping the group together. We encountered a good sized potato grouper at a cleaning station. He was letting some small wrasses "clean" his teeth. Oswaldo kept a good pace and paused for the photographers. During our surface interval, we were offered water/soda and some fresh fruit. The captain & Oswaldo switched our equipment to full tanks of air while we relaxed. The second dive was as nice as the first. We were surprised when we surfaced and we were very close to the cruise ship dock & the Carnival Legend.

Once back onboard the Legend, we grabbed a quick bite to eat. The rest of the afternoon was spent lounging in our room and on our balcony.

Dinner lasted until almost 10pm... and by that time we were just too stuffed and tired to think about doing anything like attending the nightly show. So, we went back to the cabin and had another early evening for us. Our room steward has refilled our ice bucket & our cooler, and left us a towel animal.

#### **Thursday, April 9, 2009 – Roatan**

We were awake and hanging out on our balcony for the docking at Roatan. From our balcony we could hear & see the band & dancers on the dock that were there to welcome us to Roatan. Today we easily gathered all members of our group that would be diving today (Shane, Cooter, Andrew, Pete, & Mary).

First order of business was to get a taxi to take us to the West End where Native Sons is located. We found it interesting that here, even when we told them that we had a prepaid excursion/tour, in addition to the driver, we were given a tour guide. The tour guide was a nice young lady who works for tips. Another interesting thing, our driver & guide were ours for the day. After dropping us at the dive shop, they parked nearby and hung out with us.

We arrive early to the dive shop, around 8am. We were met (not greeted) by a lady, who did not introduce herself, and simply told us to go next door for some breakfast and come back around 8:30 when her staff would be there "to deal with us"... very rude.

So, we wander around the beach area, until 8:30. When we come back to the dive shop the other divers going with us already have their gear set up. We have to fill out the paperwork before we can even begin setting up our gear. A very polite dive leader, Alex, introduced herself, checked our c-cards, and then directed our group to our tanks, so that we could set up our gear. Pete & Mary were renting gear, so all they had to do was verify that everything was in working order. But the rest of our group had their own gear, and had to set it up.

Native Sons set the tanks for our group in the pathway between the tanks already set up with gear and the dive boat, then the rude lady complained that our groups gear bags were in the way and we needed to move it as soon as possible so that she and her staff could take the gear that was already set up down to the boat... then the rude lady told us to hurry up because the other divers were already in the boat waiting for us. Mary almost lost her temper.... We were at the dive shop early. The rude lady could have directed our group to tanks, and we could have had our gear set up and ready.

The boat was full and there was no room to move around. Fortunately the ride to the dive site is around 5 minutes. The entry for this dive is a roll back.

The first dive started out beautiful. Alex then led the group into a channel where the viz dropped to 30 feet and had us swimming against the current. It became difficult to keep up with her. One of our members couldn't make the swim into the current and had to surface about 100 feet away from the rest of the group.

We were taken back to shore for our surface interval. Since Native Son did not offer us any refreshments and expecting about an hour, Cooter & Andrew when to a next door café to order some drinks & snacks. Alex came looking for everyone about 30 minutes later, before Cooter & Andrew had received their food. The café boxed up their food so that they could take it on the boat. Andrew decided to stay on the boat and eat rather than go for his second dive. The second dive had only our group on the boat, so it was much nicer.

Alex led us on a nice drift dive going with the current. The only negative comment here is that we kept ascending to 20 feet then descending to 60 feet. Mary had a little too much weight and was constantly adjusting the buoyancy of her BCD.

Back on shore the customer service from the owner/manager had not gotten any better. Sadly this was the only place on this trip where we could have bought a dive t-shirt and because of their poor service we didn't want to advertise for them.

Our taxi driver loaded our heavy gear bags into the van and off we went. Our guide had him take us on a "short cut". I don't think it was any real short cut, but it did give our guide the opportunity to point out a few fruit trees and tell us about the noni noni trees. According to our guide, people believe that the noni noni juice may cure cancer & aids. She also said that it was good for the man... which Mary translated into "it tastes like crap". She admitted that she would have to be really really sick to drink the noni noni juice.

Once back onboard the Legend, we grabbed a quick bite to eat. The rest of the afternoon was spent lounging in our room and on our balcony.

Again after dinner, we are too stuffed and tired to think about doing anything like attending the nightly show. It was very tempting to go up for the bathrobe party tonight... but we didn't.

## **Friday, April 10, 2009 – Belize**

Un-Belize-able! What a beautiful place but I'm getting ahead of myself.

It was a little chaotic getting off the ship this morning. We were very lucky to get to the lounge when we did to get our tender #2. Carnival first loads the tenders with passengers that purchased tours with Carnival then any excess room, well, then and only then do they call passengers from the list that we were on by numbers. We actually managed to get on the first tender to shore. It is a long tender ride... something like 5 miles.

For today's excursion we booked with [www.belizecruiseexcursions.com](http://www.belizecruiseexcursions.com). We will be visiting the Mayan ruin site of Lamanai. Lamanai is one of the largest Mayan sites in Belize, expanding over a huge expanse on the Belize New River, the Lamanai Mayan Center holds over 800 structures deep in the Tropical Forest. Lamanai (Submerged Crocodile in Mayan) was occupied as early as 1500bc.

Just as soon as getting off our tender, Mary spotted a gentleman with a sign for our tour company.

We are guided by this gentleman to a booth to pay the balance of our tour. And then we waited... They have other reservations for this tour and we are the first to show up. Only one other couple made it to shore in time to depart with us. We are glad that the minivan trip won't be crowded, but sad for those who miss this tour.

The tour advertises that "Getting to Lamanai is half the fun". We start at the Port of Belize City with a 1 hour van ride North to the Orange Walk District of Belize, the drive lead us across rivers and vast expanses of land giving us a Belizean Country tour. In Belize City our guide, Ellio, told us that the city is actually 2 feet below sea level. On the drive through the country Ellio pointed out fruit trees, flowers, and even pulled over to let us get some good pictures of some spiny iguanas sunning themselves on a hedge. Ellio told us that they eat the green iguanas, not the spiny iguanas.

Once at the Tower Hill Bridge we were given time for a bathroom break before we boarded a boat for a spectacular river cruise. Before heading upriver to Lamanai, Ellio took us to "monkey island". Ellio's family had two pet spider monkeys, and once they got too large they released them on this island. They still come by everyday to feed the monkeys, named "Chip" and "Monk". One of the monkeys climbed on our boat to take a banana from the hand of one of the other tourist. Then we traveled through miles of virgin river fauna, viewing majestic trees with overhanging air plants and colorful Orchids. Along the way Ellio pointed out many birds & flowers. Ellio even stopped the boat just inches from some resting insect bats. The boat ride was a wonderful opportunity for spotting a variety of tropical birds, including the Jesus Christ bird. It's called this because it appears to walk on water... it's actually walking across the lily pads. Along the way, Mary actually spotted what she thought was some kind of hawk. What she actually spotted was a Snail Kite. It is a bird with a hooked shaped beak used for eating snails from their shells. We passed some local friendly fisherman and by a German Mennonite community where one of their horses was getting a drink from the river.

Our boat docked at the Lamanai Welcome Center and our exploration with Ellio began. We thought that the dock, as well as, the trails was well kept. We paused briefly at the welcome sign for some pictures. Ellio guided us along the path towards the bathrooms for one more opportunity. Along the way Ellio suddenly stopped and quietly yet firmly told everyone to stop and back up slowly. Right there in our path was a 6 foot snake... well, we are in the jungle. Ellio consulted his guide card which identified the reptiles of the area. The card identified it as a blacked tailed creibo, a non-venomous species. Even so, Ellio finds a park ranger to show him the snake. All this poor snake wanted to do was get away from us as fast as he could. When asked, Ellio told us that venomous snakes found in this area are killed because of the risk to tourists.

We continued on the path though the jungle. Along the way, many trees & plants have signs. We came up to one labeled "give & take". Ellio explains that the spines on this tree will "give" quite severe pain, while the sap inside the tree will "take" the pain away. The first temple sight that we reach is the Mask temple. At the Mask temple Ellio called to the Howler Monkeys and they came down to lower branches from sleeping high at the tree top of the huge Ceiba tree. We were able to get quite a few nice photos of the Howler Monkeys. Here in Belize the Howler Monkey is known as their Baboon. Our time at Lamanai for exploration was approximately 1.5 hrs., which gave us just enough time to climb 125 feet to the top of the Lag Temple. From the top we had a view of the whole Lamanai ruins, New River Lagoon and the vast Lamanai Archeology Reserve. Then we quickly passed through the Ball Court and the Jaguar Temple on our way back to the dock

The time that Carnival spends in Belize is really short. Because of this the boat ride back, was much faster with no stops for wildlife viewing. The only thing that we missed was seeing any of the Belize crocodiles, but none where basking in the sun this early in the day.

Once back at the Tower Hill Bridge, we had just enough time to inhale the lunch provided. It was very tasty; some chicken, rice & beans, salad, coleslaw, and fresh fruit. The van ride back was done quickly (but still under the speed limit). We really wish that we had more time in Belize.

We boarded one of the last tenders back to ship. Back on board Pete really enjoyed the scenery and watching our progress on the interactive TV leaving the shallows that surrounds Belize. It took a good hour to get to deep water.

### **Saturday, April 11, 2009 – At Sea**

After a lazy morning spent hanging out on our balcony, we actually participated in two activities.

First activity was a one mile walk for the cure. Carnival does this on every cruise raising money for Susan G. Komen for the Cure. This week alone \$1200 was raised to fight breast cancer.

The second activity was the famous galley tour. All of tonight's entrees are on display and they look yummy. Bring on dinner!

The real bumner today is having to pack and put out our luggage before midnight.

### **Saturday, April 12, 2009 – What!?!?! We have to get off the ship!?!?**

Getting off the ship was almost as easy as getting on. We were called off in groups to the terminal to find our luggage, clear customs, and that was it. After a short wait, the van from the hotel picked us up and brought us back to the hotel. Pete drove the van around from the parking garage and we got all our gear loaded up for the 8-hour drive home. The drive home went very smooth, including a short detour to get around the perpetual traffic jam just south of Atlanta. Home at last! Too bad we now have to go back to work...