



Welcome to Rott's Manor

Pete & Mary Clukey

Puerto Vallarta 2008 Trip Report

Warning this will be a lengthy report... Mary kept a vacation journal this time!

Friday, 8/29/2008 – ATL to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico

It's an early morning after a late night of packing. We make it to the airport with plenty of time. We grab some pastries for breakfast. Then Pete takes a quick nap and Mary begins reading one of the three books she's bringing on this trip. Flights are on time, the connection in Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) barely gives us enough time to grab a quick bite to eat before our flight to PVR.

As we land in PVR, Pete spots a very special airplane. John Travolta's Boeing 707 with Qantas paint scheme.

In PVR we clear customs & immigration with no problems. At the baggage carousel our luggage shows up with hardly a new scratch. Now just one more big obstacle to clear before we can relax; the gauntlet of timeshare sales reps at the PVR airport who (thanks to the government) position themselves between baggage carousel & official transportation. The timeshare reps try to "impersonate" the official transportation reps, and if you do not know this ahead of time, you could end up with quite the diversion on the way to your resort. Well, thanks to sites like tripadvisor.com, we know about their scam, and we breeze right past them (while they chase us with offers of free tours, etc.). Just as it appears that we will be exiting the airport, we enter the last tiny room which does have the official transportation handlers. We easily spot Olympus Tours (in their orange shirts), the company that AA Vacations has booked our hotel transport with. We are immediately directed to a taxi. The driver points out the Wal-Mart, Home Depot, & other American businesses on our short drive to the hotel.

Within 20 minutes, we arrive at RIU Vallarta (<http://www.riu.com/en/hotel-riu-vallarta-mexico.html>). We leave our bags with the bellman and begin the brief process of getting checked in; which includes getting a bracelet for the week & a refreshing cold juice drink. We are informed that our room will not be ready until 3:00 pm. However, now that we are wearing our bracelets, we can use the hotel's facilities including the restaurants. We are quite hungry and make getting food a top priority. Just about this time a man wearing a familiar orange shirt, Jose the local Olympus Tour representative, greets us. Jose will arrange our departure transportation and invites us to stop by his office for a briefing (not a timeshare presentation). We assure him that we will stop by right after we get something to eat. He's very pleasant and makes sure that we know how to get to the restaurant.

We find the lunch restaurant, the Flamingo, which serves a continental breakfast from 10:30 am to noon; lunch from noon – 5:00 pm; and functions as al-a-carte (reservation only) restaurant from 6:30 pm to 10:00 pm. We grab a quick lunch and are pleasantly surprised by both the quality and the variety of the food.

With bellies full, we make our way back to Jose's office (which is a couch in the lobby). First Jose jots down our return flight information and asked that we stop by again later to pick up our return travel vouchers once he's had a chance to verify our departure time. Then Jose tells us all about the resorts facilities (all of which we already knew about), then he starts to talk about tours that his company offers... that's when Mary stops him and informs him that we already purchased our tours online with the exception of SCUBA diving. Mary haggles with him over prices for diving but isn't happy with what he is offering so, she tells him she will think about it.

Now it's after 3:00 pm, so off we go to the front desk to get the key to our room, #6058 on the sixth floor. It's ready. We stop by the bellman's station to let them know where to bring the bags. We ride the elevator up, and turn a corner, walk about 10 doors down a hallway, and voila, we find our room.

The room is very nice, probably better than we expected. Our balcony faces the other wing of the building but the way the building is design it takes advantage of the curve of Banderas Bay. So, not only can we see the beautiful bay, but we also have a view of the family pool with slides.

Soon the bellman arrives with our bags. He points out a few of the features of the room; the ceiling fan, the refrigerator, and the bar. He then asks if there is anything else that he can do for us. Mary tells him that the room has a bit of a stuffy odor and that the bed is a bit too firm. He makes a call to get someone up here with a mattress topper to fix the bed issue & some spray to freshen up the room.

Shortly after the bellman leaves, our phone rings. It's the front desk checking in with us to make sure that everything is OK with the room. Pete takes a quick little nap while Mary unpacks. About 15 minutes later, we have a knock on the door. It's the maid with the mattress topper. Shortly after the maid leaves, we receive another call from the front desk to be sure that the room has everything that we need. With the room all squared away, and a softer bed, Mary is ready for a nap. So, Pete reads for a little while.

A few notes about the hotel & room so far. There is quite a lot of noise coming from the pool areas and we can hear it in the room. But it's OK, for us, it reminds us that we are on vacation & here to have fun. The service that we've experienced in the short time that we've been here has far exceeded our expectations. Even at the buffet lunch, once you filled your plate it was carried to your table by a staff member. And even though the drinks are set up as self service, the staff brought our drinks to us at the table.

Recharged from a quick snooze, we take a walk down to the beach. Ah, it IS 5 o'clock somewhere! Actually, it's after 5:00 pm by the time we find the building on the beach which houses the activites/tour desk (SCUBA Caribe), including SCUBA diving. Mary wanted to check out their SCUBA diving package prices. Well, they are closed and don't have any prices listed where we can see them. Guess we will just have to visit tomorrow.

We continue to explore the resort grounds with a stop by the bar at the busy adults-only pool. We both order a Modelo Negra, which is darker version of a Corona. Mary is busily snapping pictures when it begins to rain. So, back to the room we go to protect the digital equipment.

It's still light out and since we ate a really late lunch, we're not quite ready for dinner. The rain is just what Pete needed to lull him into another nap. Mary takes her book out onto the patio and reads until her stomach begins to grumble.

Around 8:30 pm, we go to the dinner buffet restaurant. We're not quite sure of the dress code yet, so we are wearing Hawaiian shirts and our convertible pants. As it turns out, shorts & t-shirts are fine in

the buffet restaurant. It's only the al-a-cart reservation restaurants that require men to wear long pants and a collared shirt. The buffet restaurant has a lot of food choices. We both decide to go for small quantities of several dishes to see what we really like. Everything was really tasty.

After dinner we decide not to attend tonight's show. Just about every night there are two shows; an early one for the kids and a later one geared more towards the adults. After the late show the dance club, Pacha, opens and continues until about midnight.

Back in our room we don't miss much of the night's entertainment. Tonight they have "The Ideal Couple" not sure if it's a "Newlywed" type of game, but the crowd is enjoying it. The hotel acts as an amphitheater, seemingly boosting the sound clearly all the way to the sixth floor. And our room is facing the night club. We don't usually go to bed before 11:00 pm anyways so the noise doesn't really bother us.

Saturday, 8/30/2008 – Beach day at RIU Vallarta in Nuevo Vallarta

We sleep in until 9:30 am. We shower and get ready for our "hectic" day at the beach. The shower is nice. It has plenty of hot water, water pressure and a hand-held shower head. Mary read on tripadvisor.com that the tub was slippery and to be careful. Well, ours is a deep tub and just a bit slippery. She also read that the resort was stingy with the towels. That's odd, we have four large bath towels, two hand towels, & two wash cloths; and based on yesterday's service, we don't feel that getting anything extra would be much of an issue... just call the front desk and ask. The towels could be a bit softer but that's us being very picky.

By the time we finish getting ourselves together, we've missed the big breakfast buffet in the main restaurant. So, we go down by the beach to the Flamingo restaurant for the continental breakfast. There is yogurt, some cereal, pastries, fruit, and sliced meats & cheeses.

After breakfast, we find a couple of beach chairs in the shade of the Flamingo restaurant building. And we are quite happy here with our books, until the sun gets too high and chases away our shade.

Well, it's lunch time anyways. There are almost as many lunch options as there were at dinner last night. And everything that we had was quite tasty. The only disappointing thing was that the ice cream machine ran out before Pete got his desert.

After lunch, we popped over to SCUBA Caribe to line up our diving. We just want to dive 2-3 days and spend the rest of our time here relaxing & exploring the area. Because we are RIU Class Members (something we signed up for while in Punta Cana a few years ago), we get 15% off tours booked at the resort thru SCUBA Caribe. We decide to go with just two dives. The first will be tomorrow to Las Marietas. It is a marine sanctuary set up because of the efforts of Jacques Cousteau. Then we get a day's break on Monday, before our second dive on Tuesday to El Morro. One funny thing about one of the staff members at SCUBA Caribe, Adrian; he reminds us so much of our friend Pierre.

With our dive schedule squared away, we located a couple of chairs on the beach under the shade of the palm trees. We stayed here reading the afternoon away.

But all too soon the sky began to darken up with storm clouds. It was going to rain again. This was a pattern that held true almost all week. Beautiful partly cloudy mostly sunny days until around 6:00 pm, then the storm clouds would build and it would begin to rain. And it poured tonight. Unfortunately, because tonight the resort had local artist/craftsmen selling their works and they had to scurry to cover their tables with tarps.

We skip tonight's entertainment, the Folklore Mexicano, in hindsight it might have been a good show to go see. We've never been impressed with shows at an all-inclusive, so we don't go out of our way to see them.

Sunday, 8/31/2008 – SCUBA diving Las Marietas

This is the first day while on vacation that we wake to an alarm. We need to get a taxi to take us to Vallarta Adventures (<http://www.vallarta-adventures.com/>) just down the road... and we need to be there by 7:45 am. The taxi ride is entertaining itself. Last night's rain has flooded the road in front of the hotel. Mary was beginning to wonder if the car would need a snorkel. Some of the potholes are as wide as a small car, but thankfully not as deep. The ride cost \$7 which is a lot less than the entrance to most thrill parks, so we got our money's worth! And we arrived safely and on time at Vallarta Adventures.

Check here: <http://www.clukey.com/DiveWebLogbook/DivePV2008/DivePV2008.html> to read about our dives around Las Marietas. We really enjoyed the services that Vallarta Adventures provided. It was a long day and we did not arrive back at the dock until around 3:30 pm.

We shared a taxi with some other divers back to our hotel. Once in our room we decided to enjoy the air conditioning for the rest of the afternoon.

Service at dinner tonight was really good. After dinner, we called it an early night and watched a little TV in our room.

Monday, 9/1/2008 – Pool day at RIU Vallarta in Nuevo Vallarta

Today can be described very easily. Sleep in, read in the shade of the umbrellas by the pool, eat, sleep, read.... OK, Pete did take out a catamaran (small sailboat) for an hour around 2:00 pm. He even had a dolphin surface with 15 feet of him.

The early show tonight is a magic show titled "Perros v/s Gatos". If my Spanish is correct, that translates into "Dogs versus Cats", so it sounds interesting. Keeping in mind that the last magic act that we saw was David Copperfield, our review might be a bit harsh. It was an OK show for the kids in the crowd, but lacked a lot for us.

We once again go to the dinner buffet and enjoy a variety of available dishes.

After attending the early show, we decide to skip any further resort entertainment this evening and retire to our room. Pete turns on the TV and finds a James Bond movie, The World is Not Enough, to keep us entertained for the rest of the night. And we go to sleep early tonight anyways, because tomorrow is another early morning with our scheduled SCUBA dive.

Tuesday, 9/2/2008 – ~~SCUBA diving~~... Puerto Vallarta

The alarm goes off, but neither one of us feel 100% today. Pete's stomach is a little upset and Mary has a mild headache. We open up the first aid kit (that we always bring with us on vacation) and take the meds that we need to get through the day. We were scheduled to dive El Morro, which is supposed to be a better spot than Las Marietas. But even so, we decide to err on the side of caution and not push it. So, Mary goes to the front desk to get assistance calling Vallarta Adventures to let them know that we won't be diving today.

After the meds kick in, we're up and on the go for the day. We're up early enough that we actually get to eat breakfast at the main buffet restaurant (Don Rafael) rather than the continental breakfast that we've had thus far at the Flamingo Restaurant. There is so much variety for breakfast.

After breakfast, we get the bellman to call us a taxi. We're going to the boardwalk, known as the Malecon, in Puerto Vallarta for some sight seeing. Taxis are expensive, \$20 each way, but they are mostly air-conditioned and are much faster than the public bus which is cheap, about \$6 each way for the two of us.

First we walk the beach side of the cobblestone street at the Malecon. Taking photos of the odd looking statues. They are made mostly by a local artist with a vivid imagination. The first sculpture of Puerto Vallarta's unique outdoor museum is "Los Milenios," the work of Mathis Lidice. Another of the Malecon's most famous sculptures is the "Rotonda del Mar," best described as a quirky construction of chairs sculpted by local artist Alejandro Colunga. We return back to the taxi stand on the side of the street with the stores. Since this side is shaded, it seemed like a good idea. Then we meet the "yellow shirts". The "yellow shirts" are slick timeshare salesman. They are very good at starting a conversation by offering advice (such as; you can save a lot of money by riding the public bus or asking where you are from; and amazingly they all knew someone from Atlanta or had been to Atlanta themselves)... that is when the subject changes. We were actually offered \$300 cash & a free taxi ride back to our resort, if we would attend one of their presentations.

We've safely avoided the allure of the "yellow shirts" and have been browsing the shops for a while when the call of nature is felt. Mmmm, where are the public restrooms... and do we want to go in one... Ah, then we spot the place to go (pardon the pun), a McDonalds. Isn't it great, we come all the way to Mexico and find: Wal-Mart, Sam's, Home Depot, & McDonalds!?!

I'm not sure if it was the visit to McDonalds or not, but Mary begins to feel hungry. No, we didn't eat at McDonalds. We considered eating at one of the restaurants on the boardwalk, but they were a little too touristy looking and besides, we already paid for the food back at the resort. So, we walk by the line of taxi drivers looking for one that is not smoking. When we find our guy, we get in his car and wouldn't you know it, we found the "only" cab without air-conditioning. OK, so it probably wasn't the only cab without A/C and the ride with the windows down wasn't bad at all. It was made even better by the driver who was quite talkative. When Pete grabbed Mary's camera to take a picture of a VW Thing, our driver told us that is the type of car that he learned to drive in.

Back at the resort we ate a big lunch, and then began the challenging task of hanging out at the pool in one of the Jacuzzis. Hey, it was difficult. There was that swim or wade to the bar and back, to get beer for Pete and strawberry daiquiris for Mary. And then there was that fill the entire card bingo game that Mary played. It was an afternoon with an overcast sky cover, so it was perfect for us to hang out in the pool without getting too much sun.

Around 6:00 pm the clouds began to darken and lightning was visible in the distance. So, it was time to get out of the pool and think about dinner. On the way back to the room, vendors/artists were set up again tonight. We stopped and talked to one about his handmade very colorful pottery dishes. We almost bought one, but our luggage on the way here was already pretty full and the idea of carrying something that fragile on the way back discouraged us from purchasing anything.

Pete wasn't as hungry yet as Mary was. Just outside the main buffet restaurant a soft-shell taco stand was set up most nights. So, Mary decided to grab one of those as an appetizer to last until Pete was hungry. Guess what? Pete ordered two tacos. The entertainment staff is gathering and "herding" people into the theater in preparation for the 7:00 pm show. With tacos in hand, we stop by the bar to get some water and migrate to the theater where we find a table. Tonight's show is called

the “Prehispanic Show”. Wow! This was probably the best show that we’ve ever seen at a resort or on a ship. We were very impressed.

After the show and the “appetizer” tacos, we weren’t really hungry. We go back to the room and call it an early night, because tomorrow will be an early morning. Tomorrow we go on an all day tour to Tequila Mexico for a tequila distillery tour.

Wednesday, 9/3/2008 – Tequila Six Pack Tour <http://www.puertovallartatours.net/tequila-six-pack-tour.htm>
Today will be a long day. Our tour today is scheduled to last about 11 hours. The tour bus picks us up exactly on time at 7:45 am. Our driver is Antonio and our guide is Artillo (Art for short). Art was full of lots of info... little of which we remember. According to Art, 95% of Mexicans are Catholic; the other 5% are lawyers, politicians & tour guides!

Our first stop is at a Decameron Los Cocos (<http://www.decameron.com/Eng/mexico/cocos/overview.html>) resort way up in the “jungle”. It was a very beautiful setting for our included breakfast buffet (around 10:am). In the bay was an island shaped like a shark fin. And our guide claims that rare sea birds like the blue footed booby live there.

On the way to our second stop, we passed through a Mexican security check point. It was an eye opener for some Americans on the bus. The bus was not stopped or boarded, but there were guards with machine guns at the check point.

Our second stop was at the lava beds surrounding the currently inactive El Ceboruco Volcano for a 5 minute photo op. Our guide jokes that the scientists expect it to erupt again on September 3rd around noon. Guess what day & what time it is!?!?! I think that was just his way of getting us back on the bus quickly. Although he might have had better success with the next factoid that he told us. The lava fields are perfect habitat for rattlesnakes, tarantulas, gila monsters, and scorpions!

Safely clear of the “threatening” volcano and dangerous critters, we make our way to our next stop, the Ancient Nahuatl Ruins of Ixtlan. We have only 25 minutes to explore. The ruins are quite extensive and the time that we are given for exploration is not quite enough time for us. Here there are also restrooms for our use and a little store with drinks & snacks. Before boarding the bus, we both use the facilities and purchase a cold beverage.

Back on the bus the scenery starts changing. Fields of blue agave are just about everywhere we look. Our final stop before lunch is to La Cofrida, a tequila distillery. Our guide likes this distillery best for tours because we can take pictures everywhere while others restrict the areas where photos can be taken.

Oh, if only a camera could capture an aroma. Mary is not a big fan of tequila to begin with and the odor of the fermentation process is not improving her overall view of the stuff.

We are shown the entire process from the beginning to the sales room. And learn a lot of interesting facts. An agave plant has to be at least 8 years old before harvesting for making tequila. Most tequila that is exported from Mexico is not considered true tequila because it is not 100% blue agave. Most exporters such as Jose Cuervo add sugars to speed up the process. According to our guide 100% blue agave tequila will not make you sick with a hang over; it’s all those “impurities” in the blended tequila that makes you sick. OK Art, we believe you and won’t put it to a personal test.

In the factory, Art siphons off some freshly distilled tequila for us. Everyone cups their palms, and Art pours each of us a sample. Mary sips from her palm and the stuff evaporates in her mouth, never hitting her stomach.

From the factory we are guided into the sales room for more tasting. We taste tequila that has been aged in oak barrels for 3 months & also one that has been aged for 8 months. The aging makes it smoother, but for Mary it does not improve its desirability. Even though prices are very good here, we don't buy any tequila to take home (who at our house would drink it?).

Finally it's time for lunch! We go to a small local restaurant. We are greeted, as we enter, with a cold welcome drink called a Charro Blanco (translated: white cowboy). It is made with tequila (of course), lime, salt, and soda water or the soda brand Squirt. We both order the Mexican plate. On the table are some sliced cucumbers with red pepper & salt. Mary samples them, they are not too spicy. When our meal arrives it is a large serving. On it is a large piece of thinly sliced steak, half (sliced lengthwise) of a Mexican sausage, beans, and vegetables. It was very tasty. Pete finishes his welcome drink with his meal; while Mary orders bottled water (she just doesn't like the flavor of tequila).

Back on the bus we get the bad news, it's about a 3 hour ride back to the hotels and the bus isn't making anymore stops. Ugghh, we wish we had known that; we would have brought our mp3 players. On the way back, we pass some beautiful waterfalls. Mary snaps a few pictures of them & hopes that they aren't too blurry.

By the time we get back to the resort, it's very late; 10:00 pm. Lunch was really late and we're not hungry enough for dinner. But a little ice cream is just what we needed to conclude this day.

Thursday, 9/4/2008 – City & Tropical Tour <http://www.puertovallartatours.net/city-and-tropical-tour.htm>
& Pirates of the Bay Dinner Cruise <http://www.puertovallartatours.net/pirates-of-the-bay-marigalantes.htm>

This morning we have the city tour & tropical tour; which we will always remember as the “shanghaied for shopping” tour. It started out innocently enough with a drive through El Pitillal, a suburb of Puerto Vallarta where a lot of the locals live and shop. Marina, our guide, points out that by law houses in Vallarta have to be painted solid white or mostly white with just a narrow strip (about 2 feet) of color near the ground, while businesses may be any color. The first stop being the historic main church of El Pitillal. The main attraction of this lovely little church is the carving of Jesus over the altar. The town wanted to be different and rather than having Jesus on the cross they asked the sculptor to carve His resurrection. The carving is very large and sculpted out of a single piece of iron wood. Our guide Marina said now that we have prayed we could go for the tequila tour.

This location/tequila tour is just a model for us tourists. Even though it's only a model, this place is packed full of information on the tequila distilling process, as well as, a few other traditional Mexican crafts. Before the tequila tasting, we are walked past a set of tables where a lady is hand rolling cigars and a guy is hand tooling some leather belts. The wall just the outside of the tasting room is adorned with clay masks and pottery. Once inside the tasting room/gift shop, we sampled 3 – 4 different tequilas including a couple of flavored tequilas. Pete liked the one flavored with coffee, chocolate and vanilla. While Mary preferred the much sweeter one flavored with almonds and maraschino cherries. Over and over we are told that Mexicans only drink 100% blue agave tequila, the other stuff they export.

Back on the bus we were driven along the boardwalk, while the main points of interest such as El Palacio Municipal (City Hall) and other city landmarks, such as the Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de

Guadalupe (the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe) and the statues on the boardwalk were pointed out. This was big disappointment, since the tour description describes a visit (not a drive by) to these landmarks. We're glad that we came down on our own for photos earlier in the week.

Marina pointed out that this is a very safe area because of how severe the Mexican system is on violations of the law. For example; if the police catch someone with any marijuana, there is no trial; it's straight off to jail. And, no meals are provided by the prison system. While in jail, the prisoners family is required to bring meals; three times a day. Also, when a traffic law is violated, no ticket is written, the police take the license plate of the offender to city hall where they have to go in person and pay a fine to get it back.

We then move into the old town district. We drive slowly through a crossroad where Marina points way up to hill and instructs us to look just to the left of the purple house; that is where Liz Taylor use to live. Then the tour takes an ugly turn. Our next stop is for 25 minutes to shop at this little souvenir shop. Conveniently there is only this one store and not much else around; and prices are NOT great. Back on the bus for the next stop... you guessed it, another shopping stop. This one is a jewelry store where we can haggle prices (oh goody). Mary uses the bathroom at this stop, then we make a hasty retreat out of that store. Luckily right across the street is a beautiful tile store (<http://www.talavera-tile.com/>). We admire the murals and sinks. There are artists on the upper floor hand painting some tiles. Finally something worth taking home as souvenirs, we buy a few tiles painted with tropical fish & two painted with footprints.

Finally with the shopping over, we leave Vallarta. We are driven south along the Bay and up to the residential zone of Conchas Chinas, and then we stop for a photo op overlooking Los Arcos and the town of Mismaloya, famous for the filming of "*The Night of the Iguana*" starring Richard Burton. Before we get off the bus Marina warns us about the guys here with iguanas. They will place the critter on you, take your camera, snap your picture, and then, they demand \$2 for the picture. So, we by-pass that photo op, but Mary does sneak a shot of one of the other tourist holding the iguana.

For our final stop, we are taken (literally) to the most expensive restaurant... again there are no other choices within walking distance. It's 2:00 pm, and we're very hungry. So, we order our \$50 lunch (cash only). OK, lunch portions were large and the food was good, but it was WAY too expensive. The restaurant is in a nice location with a river next to it. Several in our tour group attempt to get twisted ankles by wading through the cool river.

With the end of the "shanghaied for shopping" tour, we start to look forward to our evening excursion. Tonight we are booked on the Pirates of the Bay cruise (<http://www.marigalante.com.mx/piratesBay/index.htm>) aboard the Marigalante. The morning tour is nice enough to drop us off at the marina, saving us the \$20 taxi ride (but the lunch was still way to expensive). We arrive at the marina around 4:00 pm. According to our tour tickets, we are supposed to line up around 4:15 pm to get our marina entrance. No one is around yet, so we go in search of some shade. We are invited to sit on the taxi driver bench under a nice awning in the median of the port entrance road. The drivers are nice and talk with us while we wait. Soon it is time to go get into the marina. Our instructions are that the entry should cost \$1.50 each, instead we are charged close to \$4. Once through the gate, security checks our bags then we are directed to wait on the benches in the restaurant. But we can't even get to the benches until we are greeted by a lady and her parrot for a photo op... we say no thanks.

Around 5:30 pm, we are gathered by two mischievous looking pirate characters and guided to the ship. Boarding photos with the captain are taken by the ships photographer (available for purchase later at a cost of \$15). Then we are told that the photographer will be videoing all night long and the DVD will be available for purchase at the end of the night (\$50)... oh and the ship is a cash only operation.

The show begins by the captain inviting all the ladies up on stage for some dancing. Then it happens; three contestants are selected (one for each of the countries represented on board). Mary was selected to represent the USA. Miss Canada & Miss Mexico didn't stand a chance! And by the end of the silliness, well according to the popular vote, Miss USA did win. And in the end, all of the contestants were awarded a t-shirt for their efforts.

Then there was a little dancing to, of all things, disco tunes. Thank goodness for the open bar. Thankfully, soon it was time for dinner. Dinner was served in the dining room below the main deck. If it's supposed to be air-conditioned, it was not working very well, but the food was very good. We both ordered the chicken parmesan. After dinner we had just enough time to enjoy the setting sun, before we were summons for the Mexican Fire Dance show. The show was much like the one we watched at our resort a few nights ago. As darkness falls upon the bay, the ship pulls near the Puerto Vallarta boardwalk, the Malecon, and puts on a short fireworks show. Shortly after that, the captain shuts down the bar. This of course started a mutiny on board. Half of the crew, mostly the waiters, fought to get it reopened. Our waiter for the evening was Pepe. The row in front of us had Spider for a waiter. Both were key figures in the ensuing battle. Of course in the end of the sword fighting our waiters won and the bar was reopened for the cruise back to the dock. This was a fun night and for us the icing on the cake was the ride back to our hotel was included in the tour price.

Friday, 9/5/2008 – Last full day in Vallarta

Today we wake to no alarm... about time. And of course by the time we wake up, shower, etc. it is past breakfast time in the main buffet restaurant. So, we stroll down to the Flamingo restaurant for our continental breakfast.

Well, what should we do today? After a brief discussion we decide that we really need a couple of t-shirts from the dive shop at Vallarta Adventures. We take another \$7 taxi ride to their shop. Mary was really hoping that they would have a couple of books identifying the local fish, maybe we could identify a few of the fish we sighted while diving on Monday. Unfortunately, their shop didn't have any books like that. So, we pick up our t-shirts and then began to wander around the grounds while Mary takes a few pictures. That's when Mary realizes that she forgot to charge her camera batteries last night and they're almost dead. Well, we really just wanted a few photos of the dock area and the batteries should last for that. Sadly, the worker that we found near the path to the docks wouldn't let us go down the path. Soon, though we discover a much more interesting subject for the photos. The grounds of the tour company are home to several large iguanas. We counted ten. One even ventured out from the shade into the sun for his photo op.

On our way out to the taxi stand, we heard some splashing and went down a path to discover the source was the tour company's dolphin pools. They have an area where tourists can observe their dolphin pools and take pictures even while other tourists are participating in their dolphin interaction tours. Vallarta Adventures offers several different types interaction tours with the dolphins. We spent an hour watching a trainer with two dolphins on the side of a pool where two other dolphins were involved in a wading session with a group of tourist and their young children. Most of these kids were so small that their parents had to hold them for the whole session. The kids were about 1/2 to 1/3 the sized of the animal that they were petting and interacting with. That's got to make some impression on such a young mind. I wonder how many of them will grow up with ambitions to work at Sea World?!?!

Our little excursion is over and we're back at the hotel. We walk down the beach about 10 minutes, past our hotel all the way down to the construction site for the RIU Palace. It's nearing its completion, but just a little bit behind schedule. Originally it was set to open in October, now I think the plan is December. On the way back to our resort, we decide to have lunch at the other RIU property, RIU

Jalisco, just to check the facilities at the other resort. Our conclusion, RIU Vallarta is much better. The food is better at Vallarta and the pools are nicer too at keeping the children out of the “adult” pool.

After lunch, we go back to our room and pack a bag with books, mp3 players, & our large mugs. We spend the rest of the day lounging under the shade of the umbrellas by the pool. Of course, we first made a stop at the bar to fill up our large mugs. Pete reads, while Mary catches up on the writing in her vacation journal.

Around 6:00 – 6:30 pm, we head back to the room to enjoy a few hours of A/C before dinner. Mary takes a quick nap while Pete reads.

At dinner time, we go to the buffet restaurant like we have all week. There is a huge selection, and many of the hot dishes change every night. One thing that didn’t change from night to night was the excellent service. Everyone working in the dining area, both chefs and wait staff, were friendly and always taking good care of us. After dinner, we go back to the room to pack. While packing, we watch the movie Troy. It’s Karaoke night in the theater and from our room we can hear that some of the performers are actually quite good. Lastly, we set the alarm for 8:00 am.

Saturday, 9/6/2008 – Puerto Vallarta to ATL

This morning consists of last minute packing and photos, a big breakfast, and our departure at 10:15 am. At checkout, the staff cuts off our bracelets, thus cutting us off from our all-inclusive benefits. The ride to the airport is uneventful. Check-in at AA goes remarkably smooth. And pretty soon we’re in the upstairs mall area of the airport. We are surprised to find Vallarta Adventures has a store in the airport and the prices are exactly the same as in their shop. We could have saved the \$14 taxi rides, but then we wouldn’t have seen the iguanas or the dolphins. Mary snaps a few pictures of the murals in the airport before an official tells her “no pictures in the airport”.

Our flight from PVR leaves on time. We arrive in DFW with plenty of time for a good meal before our flight to ATL. We pass up the Chili’s restaurant and find a T.G.I. Fridays. Mary has a parmesan chicken entrée while Pete enjoys a club sandwich with sweet potato fries.

Our flight left DFW on time. Arriving into the ATL area, Mary notices some pretty large thunder storm clouds. So, we began to expect some delays, but no delay, we landed on time. Customs/immigrations were a breeze. And, all of our luggage arrived. We were home by 10:00 pm.