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Cruising with Kids

By Judy Koutsky
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Image Credit: Judy Koutsky

It's not easy to find a vacation that satisfies two high energy little boys (ages 3 and 5), while still appealing to mom and dad. Fortunately, we found just the thing on a recent cruise on [Carnival Freedom](#).

Camp Ocean

My kids can go either way when it comes to camp. The younger one often loves it, the older one wants to be with us. The nice thing about Camp Ocean, the kids' camp aboard Carnival Freedom, is that it divides kids into three age groups: penguins (ages 2-5), stingrays (ages 6-8) and sharks (ages 9-11). After spending one day at camp, my boys were hooked. They made friends that they then saw in the dining room and pool – on Carnival, the kids are the social butterflies of the cruise, making plans and comparing notes on that day's activities.

Of course, there is no shortage of fun things to do: they did face painting, played musical icebergs and had an energetic game of ocean bingo. I especially like that the camp counselors were all friendly and nice, and the camp director, Ana, took her time with the kids, coaxing those who were hesitant and making sure all the kids felt included and part of the club.

Camp Ocean is nice for parents because they give you a ship cell phone to use during your cruise (free of charge) in which the camp can call you and you can call the camp. Added bonus: you can call other room numbers and various departments within the ship. So when my husband and I got separated, he could easily reach me via my Camp phone.

Camp Ocean is open from 10am-10pm and is complimentary. The camp is open after 10pm for a nominal babysitting charge.

Amenities Aboard Carnival Freedom

In addition to the camp, the ship – Carnival Freedom – itself is a good fit for the younger set. My older son's favorite? The super-duper slide. The Twister Waterslide is three stories tall and has plenty of turns and splashes. Jack easily went down the slide over three dozen times during our cruise. My younger son, Matthew, loved the variety of tasty treats in ample supply – the tacos and burritos at *Blue Iguana Cantina*, the pepperoni pie at the *Pizza Pirate*, the burger and fries at *Guy's Burger Joint* and his favorite, the Chinese food at the *Mongolian Wok*. Of course, the ice cream station was a constant go-to.

My husband and I loved the *Steakhouse*. When we tried to decide between the crab cakes, escargot or tuna tartar for an appetizer, our waitress suggested we get all three ("It's best to try everything," she nicely encouraged). That, coupled with the filet mignon and a nice bottle of wine, was one of my favorite dining experiences. It helped that our kids were enjoying themselves at Camp Ocean, while we were enjoying our date night.

But dining in general appealed to the whole family. We had dinner at the main dining room each night and then had breakfast and lunch at the Lido buffet. There was always plenty of options—even for picky kids – for each meal.

We quickly settled into a routine on sea days. Sleep in, then a leisurely breakfast (made-to-order omelette for me and six different types of cereal for the kids); then Camp Ocean for the boys while my husband and I headed to the Serenity Retreat, the adults-only section of the ship, for a little quiet relaxation. Then pick kids up from camp, family lunch and then pool time. With three different pools and half a dozen Jacuzzis, we spent plenty of time in the water. There's also an arcade that my older son loved.

After enjoying the day, we had a nice family dinner (we also had the option to send the kids to camp for dinner) and then headed to the nightly show. The entertainment really was family-geared, so it appealed to everyone from little kids to parents and grandparents. Most nights it was a mixture of singing and dancing, with some special effects thrown in.

Ports of Call

On our Caribbean cruise, we had four ports of call: Aruba, Dominican Republic, Grand Turks and Curacao. While there were plenty of kid-friendly excursions — swimming with the dolphins, snorkeling, a trip to an aquarium — my kids love the beach, so we decided to cab it to the nearest one in each port. In Grand Turks, it was easy, the Freedom docked right at the beach, so it was just a matter of getting off the ship and walking to the sand. In fact, Turks was my favorite stop — the water was gorgeous, the beach soft and clean and the convenience unbeatable. In Aruba and Curacao, we took a short cab to the beaches — it was inexpensive and easy. In the Dominican Republic we decided to just hang out on the ship. It was nice because most of the people departed and we had the pools and deck to ourselves.

Rooms and Service

We opted for two balcony rooms for our family of four and spent a nice chunk of time outside on our private little deck enjoying the views. As anyone traveling with little kids knows, we travel with quite a bit of gear and we tend to make a mess wherever we go. It was pleasantly surprising to leave our room in one state (of complete disarray) and return to a clean, tidy orderly cabin with adorable towel animals to greet us (our favorite was the monkey). The service was always prompt and delivered with a smile. Ah, if only I could take those cabin attendants home.

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