



South America & Caribbean Viking Cruise Trip Notes February 7 – 19, 2019

Oscar Wilde Quotes That Will Change How You Travel: 'Be Afraid of Nothing'

<https://www.travelandleisure.com/culture-design/books/oscar-wilde-quotes-travel-inspiration>

Headlines

- The Islands are wonderful for those who like the sun, heat and sand. We do not.
- We were glad to have seen most of the Caribbean Islands but once is enough.
- We thought we might want to return to Cartagena but after seeing it, we do not. Again, once is enough.
- Viking does everything perfectly and there are always pleasant surprises. Being bored was our own fault.
- I read three books – tells a story of lots of free time.
- Eat and Sleep and then Eat and Nap and then Repeat. Wonder why I came home with 4 ½ pounds extra
- We had the same ship, same wait staff, same cabin attendant, and came home with the same added weight. All except the added weight were excellent.
- We booked a Viking Homelands 15-day cruise for May 2020. Same cabin.
- Next month we are on a Viking River Cruise (Prague to Berlin on Elbe River) which should be more to our liking.



An oddity: You can't make this stuff up! A few days after getting home I had a day trip to NYC to see the Sleeping Beauty Ballet at Lincoln Center. While at the pre-brunch, at a table for 6, we hit upon the fact that one of the attendees (Cynthia from Tinton Falls) had been on the exact same ship, same time, and some of the same optional tours.

Quarantined? So many ships have contamination and illness and are not in large enough numbers to be reported. Some years ago we had NOVO virus on a Holland America, pool and buffets were shut down, my mother was quarantined, I was threatened with it, people were helicoptered off the ship and some left as soon as they were at shore – but it wasn't enough to be counted.

Thus we are super careful with washing hands and it's the only place I agree to use disinfectant.

Yet – It happens! I didn't know until this meet up but Cynthia was quarantined and threatened that if she didn't stay quarantined until medical released her that she'd be taken off the ship and getting home was on her own. We knew that half of one restaurant was closed, supposedly for lack of staff, and we knew two workers who were ill and should have been quarantined.

Who goes to Puerto Rico twice in three months?

In November we were disappointed not to be able to stay at the famous historical hotel called the Caribe Hilton. But it was slated to open by December so here we are. Again.

Guess what? It is still under renovation. Guess what? The old San Juan Hilton Curio Edition is also under renovation and we are staying in part of it anyway.

But first we get on one of the new small ocean vessels by Viking cruises to see some additional Caribbean islands and also to stop two places in Colombia, one being Cartagena.

Guess what? We are on the exact same ship, the exact same room, the exact same cabin attendant and some of the same wait staff.

From www.vikingrivercruises.com - 11 Days | 7 Guided Tours | 6 Countries.

Explore southern Caribbean gems. Explore the Caribbean's most southerly ports. With San Juan, Puerto Rico as your base, sail to Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic's cultural center. In Colombia, discover historic Cartagena and Santa Marta. Continue to the Dutch capitals of Oranjestad, Aruba and Willemstad, Curaçao, vibrant with colorful architecture. Then learn about the sugar baron history of St. Kitts.

VIKING SEA - Expand your horizons on this comfortable, award-winning ship, intimate and thoughtfully created by experienced nautical architects and designers to enrich your interaction with your destination in every way. Only 930 guests; Length: 745 feet; Beam: 94.5 feet; Class: Small ships; Year built: 2016

Stateroom: Penthouse Junior Suite (PS) #8001 - Size: 405 sq ft; 11:00 AM priority stateroom access; Priority shore excursion reservations: 87 days prior to departure; 3 guaranteed priority reservations at each alternative restaurant: 80 days prior to departure; Priority booking of spa treatments: 80 days prior to departure; King-size Viking Explorer Bed with luxury linens & pillows; Free Wi-Fi; Two 42" flat-screen, interactive LCD TVs with intuitive remote & complimentary Movies On Demand; 110/220 volt outlets & USB ports; Mini-bar with alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, water & snacks (replenished once daily); security safe; hair dryer; Direct-dial satellite phone & cell service; Large private bathroom with spacious glass-enclosed shower, double-sink vanity, heated bathroom floor & anti-fog mirror; Premium Freyja® toiletries; plush robes & slippers; Purified water refilled daily; Stateroom steward & twice-daily housekeeping - 24-hour room service; Spacious closet & drawers; Complimentary laundry, dry cleaning, pressing & shoe shine services; Welcome bottle of champagne; In-suite binoculars, coffee brewer & cashmere blanket

Whee! So why not? We're old, our "kids" are self-sufficient, and we are indulgent. Tom's old phrase "it's only money, used to rile me and yet I am using it more and more myself."

Surprise. Tom didn't complain about the airplane economy seating nor the turbulence keeping us in our seats. I did. He did however arrive with his usual lack of appetite (that used to be terribly worrisome until I got used to it) and thus like usual I basically had dinner by myself.

Next up? A walking tour of old San Juan and some time on our own and hopefully a dinner for two instead of for one.



It appears that the majority of people would have trouble fitting all their luggage in these little cabins. The luggage carriers must have very good muscles.

As we arrived on the boat, Tom was hungry and we ate poolside. There was a big hamburger and a pulled pork sandwich with guacamole, all gone.

Before running off to find the duty-free store for a little alcohol, I stopped in what they called the living room for a little musical serenade.

A starter for Tom with consommé and that was as far as he got. Me? I managed much of the bread bowl. What I didn't consume, I brought for my midmorning snack. Oops, so much for watching the weight.



Salad and a wonderful chunk of cod with a mustard sauce. Before finding that Tom was in his room doing just fine and sending off pictures of sunsets.

There were some monstrous boats parked next to us as we came in and we looked like A little sardine as compared to some of the whales.

Follows are two web pictures of our room and the floor plan. You will understand when I complain in March about our Elbe river boat that has rooms of about half the size. Despite our reserving one of two of the best rooms.



I know. I have no reason to complain. I am very fond of Viking cruises and can't imagine needing anything more luxurious.

Eat. Sleep. Eat. Sleep. Repeat. Days 1-3

A huge lush buffet breakfast might include eggs Benedict for Tom and yogurt-berries-muesli for Diana followed by a morning on shore for a walking tour. Lunch begs. More lush foods with more similar type choices: vegetables and salads for one, hamburgers for the other and just in time for the lectures and port talk and or another nap before another meal.

What meals are favorites? It's hard to say but maybe it's just the last one we experienced. As I write, it was again the Chef's Table with Xiang being the title and theme.

Our health? Pretty good considering. Tom always has a set back for a day or two after traveling but he doesn't give into it and takes in all the tours, meals (or tries to), and maybe an extra nap or two. Me? I had the few hours of needing my sea legs but it didn't spook me like last time which necessitated a trip to the clinic. It was over plenty quickly.

From tour description on Days 1 to 3:

Time to explore El Viejo San Juan, or Old San Juan, with its seductive colonial charms, easy island tempo and authentic culture. Wander its narrow lanes, literally paved with history, laid with blue adoquín stone once used to ballast Spanish galleons. This evening, stroll the Old Town's azure byways romantically illuminated by street lamps.

Day 2 - Puerto Rico (San Juan), United States You have another day to take in the history and architectural beauty of San Juan, from its fanciful Condado district to the magnificent 16th-century Fort San Felipe del Morro, set on a promontory at the entrance to San Juan Bay. Or visit the lush woodland of El Yunque national rainforest. Later today, you will sail away into the Caribbean's blue waters.

8:00am Historic Old San Juan by Foot - UNESCO Explore the important monuments and plazas of historic Old San Juan by foot. Begin at La Princesa, once a municipal jail. Here, the Raices Fountain celebrates the diversity of the Puerto Rican people—their Taino, Spanish and African heritage. Enter the old city through San Juan Gate, an impressive remnant of the walls that once encircled it. View the Plazuela de la Rogativa, commemorating the city's miraculous evasion from sacking by the British in the 16th century. See the vast Fort San Cristóbal, the largest fortress built in the New World, where you can pause for photos of the mighty citadel and its stunning Caribbean backdrop. Stop at the Ballajá Barracks and the Plaza del Quinto Centenario. Admire the history-rich Plaza de San José and the Cathedral of San Juan Bautista, one of the city's oldest buildings. In the Plaza de Armas, view the Four Seasons Fountain, then return to your ship.

Day 3 - Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic Call on Santo Domingo today, one of the most historic cultural capitals in the Caribbean. Founded in 1496 by Bartholomew, brother of Christopher Columbus, the city's richly preserved Old Town, the Zona Colonial, was the first Spanish settlement in the New World and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. You will see its magnificent Gothic Cathedral of Santa María la Menor, the 16th-century Ozama Fortress and the Alcázar de Colón, home to the colony's first governor, a son of Christopher Columbus.

8:30am Panoramic Santo Domingo - Explore the highlights and famous historic landmarks of Santo Domingo, the first capital of the New World. Embark your coach for the massive, cross-shaped Columbus Lighthouse, which features a tomb that purportedly contains the remains of Christopher Columbus. Continue to the Zona Colonial, a UNESCO World Heritage Site founded in 1498 by Christopher Columbus's younger brother, Bartholomew. Pass the city walls and the Alcázar de Colón, the former colonial governor's mansion which today is filled with colonial art and artifacts. Drive to Máximo Gómez Street, named after the famous general; this central thoroughfare runs through the city and is home to the National Theater and cultural square, which houses various museums. You

will also have the opportunity to view Independence Park and the neoclassical National Palace, as well as the economic center of the modern section of the city, before returning to your awaiting ship. End

I confess that I hadn't realized that Dominica and Dominican Republic are two separate countries and now we have been to both. Both share what we feel is a sadness of poverty and trash and damage from hurricanes. Both share what seems like a population of reasonably healthy people who are quite happy and friendly. Maybe it's due to the sunshine as there is an abundance.

And by the way we are eating, we might soon look the size of the general population of islanders. Smile.



Skies over water are always dramatic. See that littlest or at least narrowest house known? The female governor added the umbrellas to make people happy. At the end of the street is the governor's house.



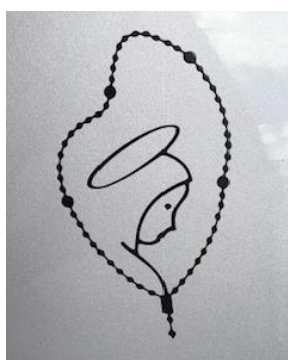
High up on the peak, in the clouds, is the governor's house. The park bench, man and bird were all bronze. We presume the gal was not but she never moved . . .



The old fort, where we'd been in November, so we left Columbus Square area and found a happy bar for Pina Coladas and Margaritas before sailing out of San Juan and by the second fort. Others saw dolphins swimming along the side of our ship.



That happy koi shirt was a recent gift from Nick, a koi aficionado who had lost so much weight that it didn't fit any longer so it got a new and happy home. Here is the first of four nights of the Chef's Table.



Sculpture on the square. This sweet, tiny and super simple decoration was on the back of a car. Just before we had a jewelry demonstration by another beauty. In this transport picture is a delivery scooter, a tourist train, followed by a horse and buggy, and just down the street from their Leaning Tower, a church.

Days 4-6 in South America and Caribbean.

Stall feeding? Isn't that the nature of the beast called cruising? We have done our share but we've also had some times of minor tummy upset too. Neither of us had any fear of withering away.

More pictures? Careful! I just posted a bunch onto an iCloud Shared Drive. If you want added to access the file, just ask.

Onward. Sunday was a day at sea. That sort of strikes me like how the recreation director says that a tour is “relaxing”— that sounds rather disgusting. I can sleep or lay in the sun at home. The cruise ship did fill up the day with all sorts of silly things like shuffleboard with the crew, trivia, jewelry lessons or rather selling jewelry, etc. but fortunately there were a few really good history lessons having to do with our next stop: Cartagena Colombia. Even dancing my under the stars with always live bands.

They also had a talk about other trips and the advantage of booking on board which cost me a couple hours of entertainment. Well it cost quite a bit more because we are now booked on a 15 day cruise through the Norwegian Fjords to include Tallinn, Helsinki, Stockholm, Copenhagen, (all of which I have been but Tom hasn't), St. Petersburg, and of course Bergen. (We booked the same cabin on a sister ship). We added days in Oslo via a famous panoramic train from Bergen to Oslo said to be dramatically special all of which will make this a 20 to 22 day trip. Yet this is counter to my theme that at this stage of life one must not buy green bananas; it is in late May 2020. But there is nothing available in my calendar before then.

I should say the big problem is that it is very expensive but I'm reminding myself that we are old and need to spend it while we can. But the serious big problem is that it would require being away about 3 weeks and ha ha ha I don't know what I would do about keeping gray out of my hair or nice looking fingernails or losing my muscle mass.

Rick Steves: The pros and cons of cruising - He says it so very well. We agree.

<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/travel/destinations/2019/02/11/rick-steves-europe-cruises/2837008002/>

More. A day at sea gives more time to chitchat with the workers. We have some favorites from before and especially a little Philippine gal who hugs us all the time and is most attentive with the best smile ever. We have a cabin attendant who remembered us and gives us special attention. We learned that there are 36 nationalities working on board. Two of them are from St. Petersburg with one named Alaina, so near to daughter Alayna. And the other extremely well-traveled and a little bit Haughty suggesting that she came from “royalty”.

Probably the Philippines supply the most workers followed by Bali. There are so many from these nationalities that some are required to change their names. Our cabin attendant Gudi became Andi because there were so many named Gudi.

Viking has surprised us to keep such good workers after their big expansion. All workers act like they are best friends to us customers and everyone is cheerful, nice looking, and hard-working. No, it can't be for tips because tipping is only done privately at the end and it is shared overall. I am reasonably certain there are no Americans working here as they would never do the hard work, put up with the long hours nor be so cheerful or look so good. Sad.

Daily Updates by Viking -

Day 4 - Cruise the Caribbean Sea - As you sail the sapphire-blue waters of the Caribbean toward Costa Rica, take advantage of the many amenities of your ship. You might take in an enrichment lecture on board, or sip a cocktail and enjoy the view through the two-story panoramic windows of the Explorers' Lounge.

Day 5 - Cartagena, Colombia - Explore the stunningly picturesque port of Cartagena today, a cultural treasure with its scenic setting on the Caribbean Sea and intact colonial city. You will see its extensive San Felipe de Barajas Fortress, boasting the longest walls in South America. Explore the spectacular Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site of picturesque, tree-shaded plazas and beautifully preserved buildings with colorful balconies. You will also visit the stunning church of San Pedro Claver, named for the patron saint of missionary work.

Panoramic Cartagena - UNESCO - Discover Cartagena's past and present during a panoramic tour of this major port city. Drive with your guide to the impressive San Felipe de Barajas Fort to view its exterior. Construction began in 1536, and the fort took a total of 121 years to build. Once a major defense against pirates, today it is a remarkably restored edifice and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Continue to the Old City, where you will stop at the dungeons within the walled city. Originally built to store provisions for the military, today they house an upscale handicrafts market selling brightly colored cloth, woodwork and woven bags made by the indigenous people of Colombia. Spend time browsing the wares made by these artisans, then take a scenic drive through Bocagrande, a chic and modern beach area that mixes luxury apartments with deluxe hotels and trendy cafés. Your tour will conclude back at your awaiting ship.

Day 6 - Santa Marta, Colombia - Uncover the treasures of Santa Marta, where independence hero Simón Bolívar is memorialized and remains of the Tairona culture in lush mangrove forests provide a fascinating glimpse of the region's indigenous tribes. Founded in the 16th century, Santa Marta is Colombia's oldest surviving city. Wander among its pleasant plazas and well-preserved colonial architecture, stopping to see the impressive cathedral. Its pedestrian zone is lined with charming houses that date to the early colonial era. End



Moules in the Italian restaurant

This Fort was held by the Spanish against the British and it probably changed the whole course of history. I hadn't realized how important was the Caribbean.

Yes they are very colorful and quite inventive in their sales and like in Chile we were impressed that they were selling versus begging.

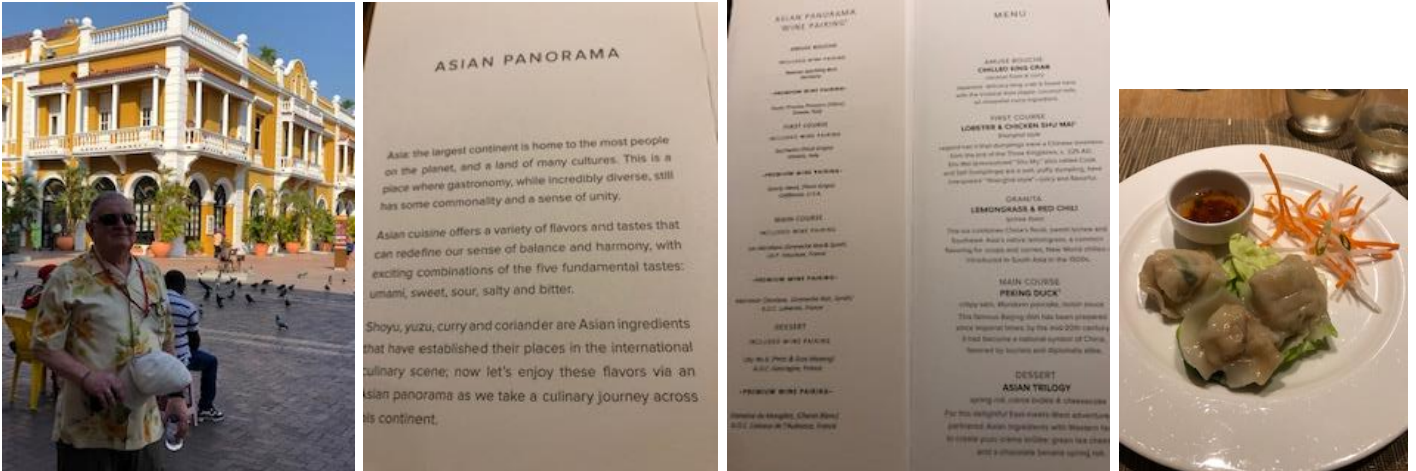


An example of colonial architecture.

At one time in history, the door knockers represented their status in society.



Merchandise everywhere.
The shoreline of Cartagena Columbia with old town not far away.



Our second time to eat at the Chef's Table and always a delight.

Tomorrow we dock in colorful Curaçao just above Venezuela. Wish you were here.

Days 7, 8 and 9 in the Caribbean

Another day at sea. It probably means pool time, shuffleboard, and another day of relaxation to many. To me it meant going green from the extremely windy weather and extremely roly-poly boat and being bored silly. I was ready to book a cruise around Cuba with some interesting stops until I reflected on it taking a day at sea coming and going. I think I'll find something else to do in February. Fortunately our March trip is on a river boat which has always been quite smooth.

We've now been to Curaçao and Aruba, both of which appear to be the cleanest and neatest if not wealthiest of all the islands we have seen. Both are part of the ABC's and basically owned by the Netherlands. Being rarely hit by hurricanes certainly helps them.

Curaçao is probably the only island we had considered visiting in years past so it was somewhat sad that heavy winds and strong currents caused us to dock 4 to 5 hours late.

Aruba calls themselves One Happy Island. They should because Tourism is now the number one employer with only a fraction of 1% unemployment.

Both islands and especially Aruba seem particularly dry with cacti in abundance and thus you wonder where their water comes from? Desalination or reverse osmosis.

In the United States we wonder how all the nationalities can ever get along together, despite our being a country of immigrants, but in these islands, they seem to be doing it just fine. In Aruba, out of

only 110,000 population, there are 97 nationalities. Pretty much everything is imported as they are dry and on a very small landmass. Just as difficult for agriculture, their four seasons are Summer, Summer, Summer and Summer. They are after all very close to the equator. I think the temperature stayed at 80° from morning till night though it was very windy which apparently is common all year round.

We were amused at the huge amounts of shopping. Outside of Cruise terminal's and especially the big ships are all brands that we could think of as well as most all of the United States chain restaurants. Some ports are junkie whereas these two have been quite elegant. It is convenient that our ship is small enough to pull into areas where the large cruise ships cannot.

You might again wonder why we choose our November cruise of the West Indies Islands and this one? Out of curiosity. After living south of Miami and never caring for any of it, we really should have known better. Yet this is not a complaint as there were so many good and interesting aspects of the cruise. It just makes me more so appreciate Europe. I now feel like I have seen enough of the Caribbean.

From Viking:

Day 7 - Willemstad, Curaçao - Tour the colorful town and harbor of Willemstad, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with its unique blend of Spanish and Dutch colonial architecture. Stroll the charming streets, lined with rainbow-hued buildings. Marvel at the moveable Queen Emma Bridge, a pedestrian harbor crossing that links two districts of the city, and see the oldest surviving synagogue in the Americas.

Tour- Snapshots of Willemstad - Discover this friendly, quirky island's best in the capital, Willemstad, whose colorful Old Town is a UNESCO Site. Take a scenic drive to Caracas Bay. Stop for photographs and admire the view from Fort Beekenburg, located atop a rocky outcrop overlooking the bay. Return to Willemstad, a jumble of delightful Dutch houses in rainbow hues and Spanish and Portuguese architectural styles, and stop at Wilhelmina Square. Here, you can choose to return to your ship, or continue on to the Maritime Museum to discover more than 500 years of history as you browse the exhibits of nautical charts, ship models and navigation equipment. After, tour the colorful Old Town, with its sparkling harbor spanned by the Queen Emma Bridge, which swings open to make way for ocean ships. At Fort Amsterdam, see the Governor's Palace and old Fortkirche church. Pass the Mikvé Israel-Emanuel Synagogue, the oldest surviving synagogue in the Americas, en route to your ship.

Day 8 – Oranjestad, Aruba

Visit the welcoming Dutch island of Aruba and its colorful capital, Oranjestad. Once strictly a horse-breeding farm, the city grew up around Fort Zoutman and became the capital in the 1820s when the discovery of gold brought settlers here. You will visit the historic fort and the Willem III Tower, home to the historical museum. In Wilhelmina Park, you can admire statues of Dutch Queen Wilhelmina and Anne Frank, the young girl who hid in her Amsterdam attic from Nazis.

Tour - Aruba Panorama - On a scenic drive, discover Aruba, the picture-postcard Caribbean island with endless white, sandy beaches. Your first stop is the Natural Bridge, where you will learn how the power of nature has sculpted the rocky landscape to create one of the island's most unique architectural features. Board your motor coach and continue your drive past the Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins as your guide regales you with tales of Aruba's 19th-century gold rush heyday. See the beautiful Alto Vista Chapel, a beloved heritage landmark offering stunning panoramic views. As you travel back to rejoin your awaiting ship, enjoy the scenic coastline.

Tour - Butterfly and Ostrich Farm - Stand amid a shower of butterflies and feed baby ostriches at two of Aruba's more unusual wildlife sanctuaries. Aruba's dry, rugged terrain is an ideal habitat for the largest bird species on Earth: the African ostrich and Australian emu. During your visit to an ostrich farm, you will learn about these amazing creatures that can reach speeds of up to 43 miles per hour. See the incubators in which chicks are raised and have a chance to feed the flock. After a short break for refreshments, continue to Aruba's Butterfly Farm, a lush tropical garden that supports a large variety of beautiful butterfly species. Guides will explain the life cycle of these delightful creatures, and you will be able to observe them in every stage of their development.

Day 9 - Cruise the Caribbean Sea

Enjoy a full day indulging in the amenities of your ship. You might find your inner calm with yoga on the Sports Deck. Lounge by the Main Pool with its retractable roof and enjoy a cocktail at the Aquavit Bar. Tonight after an al fresco dinner at the World Café, settle in for some light jazz and a nightcap at Torshavn. End.



Entering Curacao with a view from the explorer lounge which is next door to our room. We sometimes have costumed performers on our way to the guided tour. It was far too windy for these costumes.



The pontoon pedestrian bridge was saved from the lover locks by this huge heart meant for collecting them.

The small size of our cruise ship means we can usually dock closer to town than any of the monster ships.



Aruba is full of partying tourists and this crazy bus was only one of many. One of the top 10 beaches in the world per some surveys and these two trees have been pictured in many weddings.



Our guide to the butterfly farm was not only smart and pretty but had on this cute butterfly dress. Due to the volcanic and or coral ground, cemeteries are above ground. They are also quite colorful.



After our Chef's table Mexican menu to include a lush dessert, came along this extra added plate. It was after all happy Valentine's Day.

To you too, Happy Everything!

Days 10 to the end

I wasn't kidding when I said "to the end." I am glad to have come on these two trips and experienced the Caribbean but I would not come back.



We probably stayed on a couple days too long. After the cruise would've been an appropriate time to go home instead of attacking the heat of San Juan and a hotel that probably shouldn't have been opened yet.

The hotel is old and was once elegant and if it had proper management, it might still be good. There are numerous restaurants with some of them open but the renovation continues. There appears to be miles of swimming pools and the property sits beach side too. You might recall that we had wanted and booked the historic Hilton Caribe which was due to open late last year but still it's not and it's all due to Hurricane María about 1 1/2 years ago.

Our last tour off the ship was in Saint Kitts and it was the scenic Railroad. We were in Saint Kitts in November and did the basic overview tour so I was pleased to do this optional one. An old historic railroad used by the closed sugar plantations took us over numerous bridges along the coast all the while being served piña coladas and mango daiquiris.

The Black rocks from their volcano gave us views of the black sand beaches with views of high volcano hills in the background. If that sounds delightful it mostly was but still have the poor villages and damage from the hurricane which are all rather unsightly. Our last night of dining was again at the chef's table with a repeat of our very favorite which was Mexican. We weren't sure it was right to have wine pairings with Mexican so Tom added a margarita but the wines turned out to be fine.

While we were sailing from St Kitts to San Juan another Norwegian ship had a problem.

San Juan cruise ship accident - it was Not us!

https://m.huffpost.com/us/entry/us_5c655f6ae4b0aec93d3bf349/amp

There is something about tour groups or cruise ships sailing in that you meet people like kids do at summer camp: you think you'll keep in touch but you never do. In this case our November crew felt like family. Our little sweet Filipino Gladys had a birthday, she had intended to be home for it, her manager convinced her to stay on for another cruise, so we honored her birthday.

From Viking:

Day 10 - St. Kitts (Basseterre), St. Kitts & Nevis

Call on St. Kitts today, Britain's first Caribbean settlement that grew into a sugar-producing powerhouse; 68 plantations operated at the height of the boom. You will learn about this lucrative colonial era at St. Kitts's Fairview Great House & Botanical Garden, a fascinating repository of relics and beautifully preserved rooms that provide a glimpse of the lives of sugar barons. Or, visit the Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

AM - St. Kitts Scenic Railway - Relax and take in the view on a scenic and historic train ride into the magnificent heart of an unspoiled country. Transfer with your guide to the island's Needsmost Station, where you will board the only railcars of their kind in the world. The "Island Series" of the St. Kitts Scenic Railway are double-decked, with an open air observation platform on top that puts you high above the sugarcane and island vegetation. You can also watch the lush countryside pass by from the lower air-conditioned parlor, featuring huge six-foot vaulted windows, colorful artwork by local artists and charming rattan furnishings. Skirt the volcanic slopes of Mt. Liamuiga, cross numerous tall steel-girder bridges, see dramatic black-sand beaches and pass crumbling plantations. Along the way, gaze upon sweeping vistas of nearby Nevis, St. Bart's, St. Martin, Saba and St. Eustatius. Enjoy complimentary drinks and an engaging and fascinating narration throughout the trip. Snack included.

Day 11 - Puerto Rico (San Juan), United States

Hotel: El San Juan Hotel, Curio Collection of Hilton – 2 nights add on.

From <https://curiocollection3.hilton.com/en/hotels/puerto-rico/el-san-juan-hotel-curio-collection-by-hilton-SJUCUQQ/index.html>

Located on a two-mile stretch of the award winning Isla Verde Beach the El San Juan Hotel, Curio Collection by Hilton is popular with guests and locals alike. We're also near Old San Juan's historic attractions, and SJU Airport is just 5 minutes away. With no passport required for US citizens, our hotel is an easy tropical getaway.

Relax in our newly refreshed guest rooms and suites, all thoughtfully designed by award-winning architect Jeffrey Beers. Guest rooms feature floor-to-ceiling windows, sensor-activated air conditioning, a large HDTV and complimentary WiFi, and suites offer stunning ocean views and the option of one or two bedrooms.

El San Juan is currently offering a selection of limited, amenities and dining options which include El Cafecito the hotel's boutique gourmet coffee shop, the iconic Chandelier Bar open weekends with live entertainment, refreshing pool with new cabanas, and water sports available on the beach. These amenities and services may be periodically unavailable. Construction work will be ongoing in public

and guest room areas as refurbishment work progresses toward the iconic hotel's future Grand Reopening.

Post-tour package for 2 days: Puerto Rico encompasses the most alluring qualities of the Caribbean: white-sand beaches, lush rainforests and inspiring Spanish colonial architecture. Compact and elegantly planned, Old San Juan, or El Viejo San Juan to the locals, spans the centuries. El Morro fortress has been standing watch over San Juan Bay since the 16th century. Its 20-foot-thick walls rise straight from the roiling sea waters, and its formidable cannons peer out to sea. The dense streets of the centuries-old city, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, are paved with steel-blue adoquín stone, used to ballast the Spanish galleons that brought settlers and goods here. These colorful, narrow byways lead to picturesque multihued facades and townhouses with neoclassical balconies.

What To Do Per Hotel: Nestled on Isla Verde Beach and surrounded by 15 tropical acres, our resort in San Juan is minutes from popular restaurants, historic sites, shops and museums on the island. Explore the cafés, tree-lined plazas and charming architecture of Old San Juan, and step into history at forts and castles like Castillo San Felipe del Morro and Castillo de San Cristobal. Learn about fine and contemporary art at San Juan's museums, or sample rum as you tour the Bacardi Distillery – all just a few miles away. Looking for a day trip? Venture to El Yunque National Forest for tropical trails and scenic views, or trek through limestone caves and waterways at Camuy River Cave Park. End.



Should I be looking at this artsy hairdo or at the scenic old historic railroad views. In May we will do another historic railroad from Durango to Silverton.

Not everybody was interested in the views. The train mostly ran along the shoreline, through old sugar plantation villages. Maybe colorful but also very poor and still with hurricane damage.



Black sand beaches that came from volcanic action. The roads getting to the railroad and back were very much like the Road to Hana on Maui but full of a lot of crap and junk.

We saw some sunrises but more sunsets.



The historic hotel in San Juan had plenty to admire but equally plenty to get pissed off about. It was not typical Hilton management or service.



The tree in the back poolside was impressive and must have been planted when the hotel was first built. We needed the sun to go down before we could brave the outdoors heat. We did hightail it to the first Mexican restaurant available so we could have fish tacos for one of us and regular tacos for the other. But I figured you've seen plenty of fish taco pictures so none here. We did this two nights in a row.

Last of the Caribbean cruise pictures by Tom



Entering Curacao



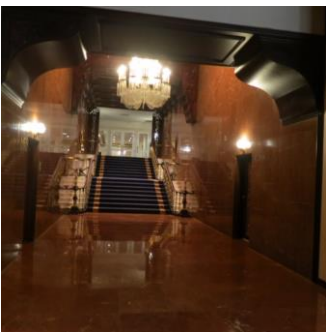
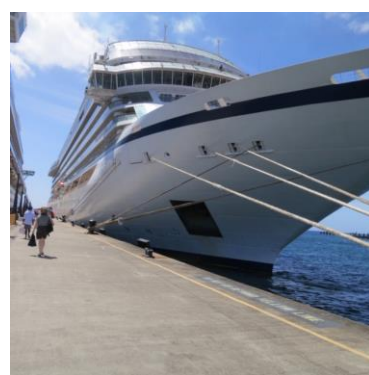
The history museum.

At least 20 selfies in short walking tour, each exactly the same pose like this

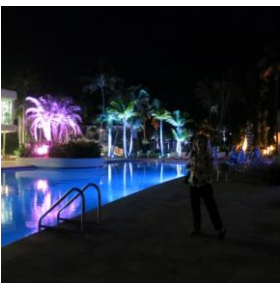


Monkey kissing narrator??? No, just an optical illusion

With free rum drinks during the two hour ride. Now there's a 'do'



Hotel El San Juan for two days after the cruise – and their magnificent tree!



A night time walk since it was so hot during the day. See the glow from Old San Juan

On that – good night.

PS Tom has lots more photos and maybe they'll soon be up onto www.TomsKoi.com at PhotoShows.

Message from Viking's Chairman upon arriving home:

Welcome home, and thank you for choosing Viking for your recent cruise.

I have heard it said, "Traveling leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller." If you are anything like me, you know that nothing expands, surprises and stretches you like travel.

I am not talking about lounging on a beach with an umbrella drink and escaping from the world. I am talking about travel that immerses you in other cultures; that enables you to taste, smell and touch those iconic places you have longed to discover; and that explores hidden places few people know about, much less visit.

I trust that you found this to be true of your journey with Viking and that you are delighted to share your stories.

Thank you again for being a part of the Viking family. I look forward to welcoming you back on board soon.



Itinerary

Thu Feb 7- Day 1

8:30am Depart Newark EWR via UA#1523

1:22pm Arrive San Juan Puerto Rico SJU

Transfer to ship by Viking Cruises

11 Days | 7 Guided Tours | 6 Countries

From www.vikingrivercruises.com - Explore southern Caribbean gems. Explore the Caribbean's most southerly ports. With San Juan, Puerto Rico as your base, sail to Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic's cultural center. In Colombia, discover historic Cartagena and Santa Marta. Continue to the Dutch capitals of Oranjestad, Aruba and Willemstad, Curaçao, vibrant with colorful architecture. Then learn about the sugar baron history of St. Kitts.

VIKING SEA - Expand your horizons on this comfortable, award-winning ship, intimate and thoughtfully created by experienced nautical architects and designers to enrich your interaction with your destination in every way. Only 930 guests; Length: 745 feet; Beam: 94.5 feet; Class: Small ships; Year built: 2016 www.myvikingjourney.com - Booking #: 5019303



Stateroom: Penthouse Junior Suite (PS) #8001

Size: 405 sq ft; 11:00 AM priority stateroom access; Priority shore excursion reservations: 87 days prior to departure; 3 guaranteed priority reservations at each alternative restaurant: 80 days prior to departure; Priority booking of spa treatments: 80 days prior to departure; King-size Viking Explorer Bed with luxury linens & pillows; Free Wi-Fi; Two 42" flat-screen, interactive LCD TVs with intuitive remote & complimentary Movies On Demand; 110/220 volt outlets & USB ports; Mini-bar with alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, water & snacks (replenished once daily); security safe; hair dryer; Direct-dial satellite phone & cell service; Large private bathroom with spacious glass-enclosed shower, double-sink vanity, heated bathroom floor & anti-fog mirror; Premium Freyja® toiletries; plush robes & slippers; Purified water refilled daily; Stateroom steward & twice-daily housekeeping - 24-hour room service; Spacious closet & drawers; Complimentary laundry, dry cleaning, pressing & shoe shine services; Welcome bottle of champagne; In-suite binoculars, coffee brewer & cashmere blanket

Thu Feb 7 - Day 1 – Puerto Rico (San Juan), United States

Arrive in San Juan to embark your ship today. You will stay aboard your ship overnight, giving you ample time to explore El Viejo San Juan, or Old San Juan, with its seductive colonial charms, easy island tempo and authentic culture. Wander its narrow lanes, literally paved with history, laid with blue adoquín stone once used to ballast Spanish galleons. This evening, stroll the Old Town's azure byways romantically illuminated by street lamps.

7:30pm Dinner in Manfredi's Italian Restaurant

Fri Feb 8 - Day 2 - Puerto Rico (San Juan), United States

You have another day to take in the history and architectural beauty of San Juan, from its fanciful Condado district to the magnificent 16th-century Fort San Felipe del Morro, set on a promontory at the entrance to San Juan Bay. Or visit the lush woodland of El Yunque national rainforest. Later today, you will sail away into the Caribbean's blue waters.

8:30am Historic Old San Juan by Foot for 2 ½ hours –included and booked for 2 – EASY - UNESCO

Explore the important monuments and plazas of historic Old San Juan by foot. Begin at La Princesa, once a municipal jail. Here, the Raices Fountain celebrates the diversity of the Puerto Rican people—their Taino, Spanish and African heritage. Enter the old city through San Juan Gate, an impressive remnant of the walls that once encircled it. View the Plazuela de la Rogativa, commemorating the city's miraculous evasion from sacking by the British in the 16th century. See the vast Fort San Cristóbal, the largest fortress built in the New World, where you can pause for photos of the mighty citadel and its stunning Caribbean backdrop. Stop at the Ballajá Barracks and the Plaza del Quinto Centenario. Admire the history-rich Plaza de San José and the Cathedral of San Juan Bautista, one of the city's oldest buildings. In the Plaza de Armas, view the Four Seasons Fountain, then return to your ship.

2:00pm Ship departs port

7:30pm Dinner reservations at The Chef's Table – Xiang/Chinese theme

Sat Feb 9 - Day 3 - Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Call on Santo Domingo today, one of the most historic cultural capitals in the Caribbean. Founded in 1496 by Bartholomew, brother of Christopher Columbus, the city's richly preserved Old Town, the Zona Colonial, was the first Spanish settlement in the New World and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. You will see its magnificent Gothic Cathedral of Santa María la Menor, the 16th-century Ozama Fortress and the Alcázar de Colón, home to the colony's first governor, a son of Christopher Columbus.

8:30am Panoramic Santo Domingo for 2 ½ hours –Included tour for 2 - EASY

Explore the highlights and famous historic landmarks of Santo Domingo, the first capital of the New World. Embark your coach for the massive, cross-shaped Columbus Lighthouse, which features a tomb that purportedly contains the remains of Christopher Columbus. Continue to the Zona Colonial, a UNESCO World Heritage Site founded in 1498 by Christopher Columbus's younger brother, Bartholomew. Pass the city walls and the Alcázar de Colón, the former colonial governor's mansion which today is filled with colonial art and artifacts. Drive to Máximo Gómez Street, named after the famous general; this central thoroughfare runs through the city and is home to the National Theater and cultural square, which houses various museums. You will also have the opportunity to view Independence Park and the neoclassical National Palace, as well as the economic center of the modern section of the city, before returning to your awaiting ship.

6:00pm Ship departs port

7:30pm Dinner reservations at Manfredi's Italian Restaurant

Sun Feb 10 - Day 4 - Cruise the Caribbean Sea

As you sail the sapphire-blue waters of the Caribbean toward Costa Rica, take advantage of the many amenities of your ship. You might take in an enrichment lecture on board, or sip a cocktail and enjoy the view through the two-story panoramic windows of the Explorers' Lounge.

Mon Feb 11 - Day 5 - Cartagena, Colombia

Explore the stunningly picturesque port of Cartagena today, a cultural treasure with its scenic setting on the Caribbean Sea and intact colonial city. You will see its extensive San Felipe de Barajas Fortress, boasting the longest walls in South America. Explore the spectacular Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site of picturesque, tree-shaded plazas and beautifully preserved buildings with

colorful balconies. You will also visit the stunning church of San Pedro Claver, named for the patron saint of missionary work.

12:00 noon Ship arrives in port

2:00pm Panoramic Cartagena for 2 hours – Included for 2 - EASY - UNESCO

Discover Cartagena's past and present during a panoramic tour of this major port city. Drive with your guide to the impressive San Felipe de Barajas Fort to view its exterior. Construction began in 1536, and the fort took a total of 121 years to build. Once a major defense against pirates, today it is a remarkably restored edifice and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Continue to the Old City, where you will stop at the dungeons within the walled city. Originally built to store provisions for the military, today they house an upscale handicrafts market selling brightly colored cloth, woodwork and woven bags made by the indigenous people of Colombia. Spend time browsing the wares made by these artisans, then take a scenic drive through Bocagrande, a chic and modern beach area that mixes luxury apartments with deluxe hotels and trendy cafés. Your tour will conclude back at your awaiting ship.

There is another 3 hour on foot, demanding tour, at \$59. Diana? Not booked.

7:30pm Dinner reservations at Manfredi's Italian Restaurant

9:00pm Ship departs port

Tue Feb 12 - Day 6 - Santa Marta, Colombia

Uncover the treasures of Santa Marta, where independence hero Simón Bolívar is memorialized and remains of the Tairona culture in lush mangrove forests provide a fascinating glimpse of the region's indigenous tribes. Founded in the 16th century, Santa Marta is Colombia's oldest surviving city. Wander among its pleasant plazas and well-preserved colonial architecture, stopping to see the impressive cathedral. Its pedestrian zone is lined with charming houses that date to the early colonial era.

7:00am Ship arrives at port

7:30am Panoramic Santa Marta for 2 ½ hours – Included for 2 – EASY

Enjoy a guided walk and scenic drive through Santa Marta, the oldest colonial city in Colombia founded in 1525. It enjoys an enviable location, wedged between the Caribbean and the Sierra Nevada mountain range, and many of its most important sights are clustered within the historic pedestrian zone. See the Cathedral of Santa Marta, which lays claim to being the oldest church in the nation. Because it was continually renovated, it boasts a curious amalgam of architectural styles from different eras. Witness the Plaza Parque Simón Bolívar, surrounded by gardens and anchored by a statue of the South American "Liberator" for which it is named. Embark your coach for a panoramic drive through the surrounding suburbs, including the beach neighborhood of El Rodadero, and pass a statue to national soccer hero Carlos Valderrama ("El Pibe"). Follow the bustling thoroughfares of Avenida del Rio and Avenida del Libertador en route back to your ship.

4:00pm Ship departs port

7:30pm Dinner reservations at The Chef's Table – Asian Pano theme

Wed Feb 13 - Day 7 - Willemstad, Curaçao

Tour the colorful town and harbor of Willemstad, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with its unique blend of Spanish and Dutch colonial architecture. Stroll the charming streets, lined with rainbow-hued

buildings. Marvel at the moveable Queen Emma Bridge, a pedestrian harbor crossing that links two districts of the city, and see the oldest surviving synagogue in the Americas.

12:30pm Ship arrives in port

12:45pm Snapshots of Willemstad for 3 hours – Included for 2 – Moderate
Discover this friendly, quirky island's best in the capital, Willemstad, whose colorful Old Town is a UNESCO Site. Take a scenic drive to Caracas Bay. Stop for photographs and admire the view from Fort Beekenburg, located atop a rocky outcrop overlooking the bay. Return to Willemstad, a jumble of delightful Dutch houses in rainbow hues and Spanish and Portuguese architectural styles, and stop at Wilhelmina Square. Here, you can choose to return to your ship, or continue on to the Maritime Museum to discover more than 500 years of history as you browse the exhibits of nautical charts, ship models and navigation equipment. After, tour the colorful Old Town, with its sparkling harbor spanned by the Queen Emma Bridge, which swings open to make way for ocean ships. At Fort Amsterdam, see the Governor's Palace and old Fortkirche church. Pass the Mikvé Israel-Emanuel Synagogue, the oldest surviving synagogue in the Americas, en route to your ship.

11:00pm Ship departs port

Thu Feb 14 - Day 8 – Oranjestad, Aruba

Visit the welcoming Dutch island of Aruba and its colorful capital, Oranjestad. Once strictly a horse-breeding farm, the city grew up around Fort Zoutman and became the capital in the 1820s when the discovery of gold brought settlers here. You will visit the historic fort and the Willem III Tower, home to the historical museum. In Wilhelmina Park, you can admire statues of Dutch Queen Wilhelmina and Anne Frank, the young girl who hid in her Amsterdam attic from Nazis.

8:00am Ship arrives in port

8:30am Aruba Panorama for 3 hours – Included for 2 – Moderate
On a scenic drive, discover Aruba, the picture-postcard Caribbean island with endless white, sandy beaches. Your first stop is the Natural Bridge, where you will learn how the power of nature has sculpted the rocky landscape to create one of the island's most unique architectural features. Board your motor coach and continue your drive past the Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins as your guide regales you with tales of Aruba's 19th-century gold rush heyday. See the beautiful Alto Vista Chapel, a beloved heritage landmark offering stunning panoramic views. As you travel back to rejoin your awaiting ship, enjoy the scenic coastline.

1:30pm Butterfly and Ostrich Farm for 4 hours - booked for Diana only at \$89 – Moderate
Stand amid a shower of butterflies and feed baby ostriches at two of Aruba's more unusual wildlife sanctuaries. Aruba's dry, rugged terrain is an ideal habitat for the largest bird species on Earth: the African ostrich and Australian emu. During your visit to an ostrich farm, you will learn about these amazing creatures that can reach speeds of up to 43 miles per hour. See the incubators in which chicks are raised and have a chance to feed the flock. After a short break for refreshments, continue to Aruba's Butterfly Farm, a lush tropical garden that supports a large variety of beautiful butterfly species. Guides will explain the life cycle of these delightful creatures, and you will be able to observe them in every stage of their development. Snack included.

6:00pm Ship departs port

Fri Feb 15 - Day 9 - Cruise the Caribbean Sea

Enjoy a full day indulging in the amenities of your ship. You might find your inner calm with yoga on the Sports Deck. Lounge by the Main Pool with its retractable roof and enjoy a cocktail at the Aquavit

Bar. Tonight after an al fresco dinner at the World Café, settle in for some light jazz and a nightcap at Torshavn.

Sat Feb 16 - Day 10 - St. Kitts (Basseterre), St. Kitts & Nevis

8:00am Ship arrives in port

Call on St. Kitts today, Britain's first Caribbean settlement that grew into a sugar-producing powerhouse; 68 plantations operated at the height of the boom. You will learn about this lucrative colonial era at St. Kitts's Fairview Great House & Botanical Garden, a fascinating repository of relics and beautifully preserved rooms that provide a glimpse of the lives of sugar barons. Or, visit the Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

8:30am - St. Kitts Scenic Railway - booked for 2 at \$89 each - Moderate

Relax and take in the view on a scenic and historic train ride into the magnificent heart of an unspoiled country. Transfer with your guide to the island's Needsmust Station, where you will board the only railcars of their kind in the world. The "Island Series" of the St. Kitts Scenic Railway are double-decked, with an open air observation platform on top that puts you high above the sugarcane and island vegetation. You can also watch the lush countryside pass by from the lower air-conditioned parlor, featuring huge six-foot vaulted windows, colorful artwork by local artists and charming rattan furnishings. Skirt the volcanic slopes of Mt. Liamuiga, cross numerous tall steel-girder bridges, see dramatic black-sand beaches and pass crumbling plantations. Along the way, gaze upon sweeping vistas of nearby Nevis, St. Bart's, St. Martin, Saba and St. Eustatius. Enjoy complimentary drinks and an engaging and fascinating narration throughout the trip. Snack included.

4:00pm Ship departs port

7:30pm Dinner reservations at The Chef's Table – Mexico theme

Sun Feb 17 - Day 11 - Puerto Rico (San Juan), United States

9:00am? Disembark – time and transfer details TBD

Transfer to hotel by Viking Cruises

Need to book afternoon Sunday and full day Monday tours for post-cruise

Hotel: El San Juan Hotel, Curio Collection of Hilton – 2 nights
6063 Isla Verde Avenue Carolina, San Juan Puerto Rico Tele: 1787 791 1000

From <https://curiocollection3.hilton.com/en/hotels/puerto-rico/el-san-juan-hotel-curio-collection-by-hilton-SJUCUQQ/index.html>

Located on a two-mile stretch of the award winning Isla Verde Beach the El San Juan Hotel, Curio Collection by Hilton is popular with guests and locals alike. We're also near Old San Juan's historic attractions, and SJU Airport is just 5 minutes away. With no passport required for US citizens, our hotel is an easy tropical getaway.

Relax in our newly refreshed guest rooms and suites, all thoughtfully designed by award-winning architect Jeffrey Beers. Guest rooms feature floor-to-ceiling windows, sensor-activated air conditioning, a large HDTV and complimentary WiFi, and suites offer stunning ocean views and the option of one or two bedrooms.

El San Juan is currently offering a selection of limited, amenities and dining options which include El Cafecito the hotel's boutique gourmet coffee shop, the iconic Chandelier Bar open weekends with live entertainment, refreshing pool with new cabanas, and water sports available on the beach. These amenities and services may be periodically unavailable.

Construction work will be ongoing in public and guest room areas as refurbishment work progresses toward the iconic hotel's future Grand Reopening.

Post-tour package for 2 days: Puerto Rico encompasses the most alluring qualities of the Caribbean: white-sand beaches, lush rainforests and inspiring Spanish colonial architecture. Compact and

elegantly planned, Old San Juan, or El Viejo San Juan to the locals, spans the centuries. El Morro fortress has been standing watch over San Juan Bay since the 16th century. Its 20-foot-thick walls rise straight from the roiling sea waters, and its formidable cannons peer out to sea. The dense streets of the centuries-old city, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, are paved with steel-blue adoquín stone, used to ballast the Spanish galleons that brought settlers and goods here. These colorful, narrow byways lead to picturesque multihued facades and townhouses with neoclassical balconies.

What To Do Per Hotel: Nestled on Isla Verde Beach and surrounded by 15 tropical acres, our resort in San Juan is minutes from popular restaurants, historic sites, shops and museums on the island. Explore the cafés, tree-lined plazas and charming architecture of Old San Juan, and step into history at forts and castles like Castillo San Felipe del Morro and Castillo de San Cristobal. Learn about fine and contemporary art at San Juan's museums, or sample rum as you tour the Bacardi Distillery – all just a few miles away. Looking for a day trip? Venture to El Yunque National Forest for tropical trails and scenic views, or trek through limestone caves and waterways at Camuy River Cave Park.

Mon Feb 18 – Day 12 – in Puerto Rico on post tour
Open

Tue Feb 19 – Day 13

Time for morning tour?

Transfer to airport by Viking Cruises

2:45pm Depart San Juan Puerto Rico SJU via UA#1173

5:55pm Arrive Newark EWR

Links:

www.Myvikingjourney.com

Elbe River cruises have had a low water problem. Check sailings here:

<https://www.vikingrivercruises.com/my-trip/current-sailings/index.html>

A perfect review. - <https://www.avidcruiser.com/2017/09/makes-vikings-ocean-ships-great/>

Why Puerto Rico Is No. 1 on Our Places to Go List -

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/09/travel/visit-puerto-rico.html>