

My Chosen Bahamas Adventure

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I am back from the Bahamas and having said I would report back on the adventure that was chosen for me, I will do so here. As it happens, breakfast was the best part of the day, so I will work backward to there.

I am writing this in my room on the ship. I just got back from a morning of kayaking and snorkeling (a man is now fixing the slightly misaligning closet doors with which I had never reported a problem - that is good quality control!). It was a great time and we were all silent and tired on the way back (a good sign that we had exhausted ourselves during the excursion).

The mile back to shore had been hard work. This is largely because I pushed a fast pace with my partner. We were in much better form than we had been on the way out so I thought it would be fun to push the pace a bit. The current kept pulling us north of our landing, which added some work keeping us on course.

We were helped in our return trip by having had a good lunch and break on the one acre island that was the target of our trip. I knew that sandwiches would be served, but I had packed snacks anyway. I have a picky palette and usually find that sandwiches made for a group will invariably include something I don't like.

I was in for a pleasant surprise on this trip, however. The guides had loaves of bread and set out a selection of meats, cheeses and condiments (as well as peanut butter and jam). I had a ham and swiss sandwich. After a brief conversation with the people on the kayak next to mine, I followed the idea of someone nearby and napped on my kayak. It was great to just lie down and relax so close to the sounds of the ocean (being a TV watcher, this naturally made me think of a Corona advertisement).

The rest was well needed. We had just finished snorkeling around the island. By "around", I don't mean near, but an actual clockwise meandering swim that circumnavigated the island. Fortunately, it was a small island. Even in such a short trip, we saw plenty of coral and fish.

I felt like I was visiting "Saving Nemo". I saw a school of silver fish, some clown fish and a blue angel fish (Ellen's "Just keep swimming" fish). I also saw a star fish that was just bigger than my head. I thought I was the only one to notice it, but after the swim, one of the guys said he was right behind me and saw it as well. After seeing the large starfish, the guide handed me a smaller star fish to hold.

My trip to the island found me paired with the only other solo person on the trip, a New Yorker named Flo. Flo was friendly and energetic but. She was nervous about kayaking as she had never done it before. She said she was recently divorced and still learning to vacation alone. Her ex-husband had never wanted to do any activities on their vacations, so she was finally getting a chance to have the kind of vacations that she wanted. I was really impressed with her courage to try new things by herself.

We were the last kayak to the island, but we maintained a straight course and had a pleasant trip. The ocean there is a perfect crystal-blue and the area all around is beautiful. We took in the view and we discussed New York and her children. It was a great way to get out to the island.

It was funny to have such a great time on the kayak going out with her as I had sat next to her on the bus ride over and we hadn't said much to each other at all. I was afraid when I sat next to her on the bus that she would be a bit standoffish. In retrospect, I think we both were just cautious not to invade the others space. She turned out to be an enthusiastic travel companion.

As fun as she was, however, I enjoyed the company of another companion even more. My tour left well before my wife's fishing trip. As a result I would wake up and eat before them. She pointed out that I could get free room service for breakfast. It was tempting, but I decided to go get breakfast myself.

I have never minded eating alone and I thought it would be a good chance to see the ship. I went up the breakfast room and grabbed myself a small breakfast. As I walked to find a table, I saw an older man eating alone. He caught my eye and looked friendly, so I asked him if he would mind some company. He seemed eager to have me join him.

He told me right away that he and his wife lived in Florida and took cruises all the time. They were platinum members and the cruise line called them with discounts any time they had space on the ship. He and his wife are retired so they would often take the offer. This was all by way of explanation for why his wife didn't bother to join him for breakfast.

As it turns out, he fought in WWII in both Africa and Italy. I had just read about the brutality of the Italian campaign and he confirmed that was hard fought. His eyes sparkled as he told me that he had been part of the successful effort to kick the Germans out of Italy. As Ken Burns points out, this wasn't the "Good War" as we like to now view it through the sterilized view of history, but it was the necessary war. He had also fought against Rommel in Africa and confirmed that he was viewed as a terrifying (that is, "brilliant" as viewed across enemy lines) general at the time as well. But, he said that they had driven Rommel out of Africa and then driven the Germans from Italy.

During his time in Italy, he was shot multiple times. One shot in the chest, put him in a coma for over a week and out of fighting for three months. Once he was healed up, however, he went back to the fight.

He said he was on a ship to Japan when word came over the ship that the Japanese had surrendered and they were heading home. He said there were such cheers on the ship as would be hard to imagine.

When he returned home to South Carolina, they had no good jobs for him. Despite his heroism, he was still a black man in South Carolina and they told him (with no apology) that the good jobs went to white men. He found a few jobs in South Carolina, but ultimately moved to New York City where job opportunities for black men were better.

He worked for a trucking company driving trucks. Eventually he made his way to the office and then took over the company after the original owners retired. Now he has retired and moved down with his wife to Florida. A few years ago, he finally got government payment as a disabled veteran (something that South Carolina had virtually denied to him and New York had never paid him in great measure).

He said that he saved his money all of his life and now has payment from the government as a disabled veteran and he and his wife are enjoying retirement. He said that we still have progress to be made, but he is mostly happy that his children will never go through what he went through. He said "They will never know what I went through so that they wouldn't have to."

This breakfast and an excellent kayaking and snorkeling trip combined to make this a day to remember.