

Celebrity Infinity Antarctica Cruise Reviews

Table of Contents

Antarctica Trip Report from Kim – Brazil Girl.....	2
Member Name: YF23 Cruise Date: January 2010.....	26
Infinity on Jan 31,2010 cruisinghobby	29
Celebrity Infinity Cruise Review by moraira.....	30
Celebrity Infinity Cruise Review by MICHAEL RICH	33
Celebrity Infinity Cruise Review by Enrico Caruso	35
Celebrity Infinity Cruise Review by shackleton.....	37
Celebrity Infinity Cruise Review by darkjay	40
Celebrity Infinity Cruise Review by KruseT.....	44
Celebrity Infinity Cruise Review by anita	46
Celebrity Infinity Cruise Review by Karen_123	49

Antarctica Trip Report from Kim – Brazil Girl

<http://picasaweb.google.com.br/kvitalbrasil>

This is a tale of tempests, missed ports, mayhem and raw beauty.

Where to begin? Buenos Aires, of course, the city of tango, classic architecture and succulent meat. Our cruise was to leave on January 31st, so we decided to arrive a bit early and take advantage of this lovely city.

As our family lives near São Paulo, our flight from GRU (São Paulo's International airport) to EZE (BA's international airport) was a mere 2 hours and 40 minutes. Our kids were thrilled, as they are used to 11 hour flights! We arrived Thursday afternoon, giving us most of Thursday, Friday and Saturday to explore the city and Sunday would be our day to embark on the Infinity.

We opted to stay in the Palermo district, a hip part of BA. It is filled with chic boutique hotels, cute shops and delicious restaurants. We chose a hotel called Vain - there are only 15 rooms, so a lot of personalized attention. The decor at Vain is lovely and the made to order breakfast is amazing.

Our hotel:



Thursday afternoon, we relaxed and later went to the beautiful Abastos Shopping Mall, where there is a wonderful interactive museum for kids. I highly recommend this activity for those with kids under 12.

Friday, we visited the lovely zoo in Palermo. A sweltering day, but very enjoyable. In the evening, we ate at "La Cabrera", a Mecca for beef lovers. Great atmosphere, Malbec and juicy steaks.

Saturday, we did the touristy El Caminito and Recoleta Cemetery. We had a lot of fun. The kids loved the cemetery. At night we hired a babysitter and went out to Osaka, a Peruvian/ Japanese fusion restaurant which offers a truly unforgettable dining experience. One of my favorite meals ever. Both restaurants mentioned require reservations.





Some images of Buenos Aires....

Coming soon - January 31st- Embarkation on the Infinity.

Sunday, January 31st

Destination, Infinity....

We had had hot, clear weather since our arrival. However, rain was the forecast for Sunday and the weather people were right!

We woke up, had a leisurely breakfast and finished up our packing. We arranged a pick up through the hotel for 1:30, as we wanted to arrive around 2 and avoid the long lines and rush of noon.

We arrived at the port and were immediately confronted with a huge line of dripping people, standing in the rain with their luggage. We got into line (backtrack- our group consisted of myself , DH , 3 kids ages 6 through 12 , and my best childhood friend , Amy).We chatted and waited to get into the terminal , which took quite a while.

We finally arrived in the terminal, filled our luggage tags and health forms and got in the

embarkation lines. This was our third Celebrity cruise, the others being a Baltic cruise on the Constellation and a Med cruise on the Summit. This check in process was by far the most chaotic and slow and I noticed several passengers getting quite frustrated.

We tried to be patient and soon, we were on the ship! Yeah! We went straight to our staterooms to store our carry-ons and explore. We were fortunate enough to be in a FV corner aft stateroom (7202), which is perfect for our family. We had one on the Baltic cruise also (7199) and I found the Infinity's to be in better shape overall.

My friend Amy had a CC stateroom right next to us -7200, which was very convenient.

We went up to the buffet for a quick lunch, went to the muster drill (which took a long time because of a medical emergency) and then went out on our enormous balcony for sail away, with a bottle of champagne.

We had great stateroom attendants, Michael and Everett...we really liked them. Our wait staff was also exceptional. we had a lovely table by a window (5477) and we served by Alexis and Jackie. Truly outstanding team.

We are now aboard and supposedly headed for the Falkland Islands.

Our original schedule had us leaving on Sunday, the 31st. We were to have 2 sea days before our arrival at the Falklands. We had a wonderful private tour arranged with the notable Patrick Watts to visit Volunteer Point, which is famous for the King Penguins.

Our first 2 days at sea were lovely, albeit the first was a bit rough. My middle son, who is the only one really prone to motion sickness, got sick the first morning of our cruise. I chose to speak to the ship's doctor, as I knew that this particular cruise was going to be rough, because of the infamous Drake's Passage... I from then on medicated him daily with Dramamine. The first day we all had to get our sea legs, as there was quite a bit of rocking.

One afternoon (I believe it was the second), we were at the MDR for a luscious brunch, and we saw a group of about 10 dolphins cavorting right outside the window. Thrilling! By the way, we had 2 sea day brunches during the cruise, which are not to be missed. they are scheduled from 10 to 1, and are simply wonderful.

Our second sea day presented itself with nice weather. We opted to have dinner delivered to our balcony. We had a delicious dinner from the MDR delivered. The room service was the only real service issue on the ship. I had had outstanding room service on the Constellation, and I felt the

Infinity was less organized and slow in this aspect.

Sadly, we got an announcement that our stop at the Falklands was cancelled due to weather issues. I was really disappointed as the Falklands were on the top of my list. However, I knew that this was a possibility, as the Falklands are notorious for their weather problems. I heard a lot of grumbling on board.

We later received an announcement that we would have an additional day in Antarctica due to the cancellation of the Falklands, visiting Elephant Island, Deception Island, as well as Paradise Bay and Gerlache Strait. 3 days of viewing instead of 2 -yeah, as Antarctica, was of course the main reason for the cruise. But, little did we know, more problems were on the horizon...to be cont.

We were all ready and eager for our 3 (!) days on Antarctica. Then , the dreaded ding dong and the loudspeaker came on....along with the announcement that because of a low pressure front , high winds , strong waves and ice , Antarctica was cancelled , at least for the time being and that we needed to wait for further information.

Please bear in mind that this particular cruise was not your typical "Caribbean, Fun in the Sun" type cruise. Ports are substituted, cancelled, etc ...all the time. Let's be frank...although the Caribbean Islands each have their unique attractions, they all are pretty much about beaches, blue skies and rum. This cruise was all about destination...Antarctica. People choose this cruise for that reason. We can all argue about the cruise contract and cancelled ports, but people were very, very disappointed and upset.

This cruise was by far the cruise with the greatest mix of nationalities I have ever been on. Large groups of Germans, Indians, Russians, Koreans, and South Americans....a really fascinating array of passengers. People flew from all over for the purpose of seeing "The White Continent". After the announcement, the frustration was palpable.

What was my own perspective? I, of course felt incredibly sad too. I had prepared my children for months for our visit, reading about the fauna and geography of the continent. My kids knew about Shackleton and we had talked about the different kinds of icebergs...My youngest, Nicholas, who is 6, would wake up every day on the cruise and ask "Are we in Antarctica yet?" So, you can imagine our feelings as a family.

However, because I was with my 3 kids, safety was also a huge priority. Before embarking, I had read up on the dangers of large passenger ships in the Antarctic region. I was totally aware that the weather was extremely unpredictable and that hidden growlers (submerged icebergs) were a

dangerous reality that demanded good visibility for those steering the ship. Therefore, I was confident that Captain Michail Margaritis had made the right decision.

Conclusion-6 sea days in a row...and a big question mark. Would we get to see Antarctica?

The decision was made to totally redo our itinerary and to make an attempt to visit Antarctica later in the cruise if the weather conditions permitted.

Mind you , we had already gone through the dreaded Drake´s Passage and were actually pretty darn close to Antarctica...but the Captain felt (rightly so) that the trip just could not be now.

I am not one of those terribly experienced cruisers...I cruise for the ports. I love traveling and I have found that with 3 kids and innumerable suitcases, that cruising offers a practical and pleasant alternative. In my limited cruise experience, I have cruised the Caribbean a couple of times, the Med/ Adriatic/Aegean Seas and the Baltic region.

None of these experiences came close to the unique, exhilarating and unpredictable opportunity of sailing around the Horn, through Drake´s Passage, and along the South American coast. All the crew (many very experienced /20 years plus on cruise ships) said that the weather/ waves were like nothing else on earth. I must admit I was a bit nervous before leaving, but I found it all quite exciting. Very primal. One evening (the 11th night , if I am not mistaken) , the waves / wind / weather were so brutal that no one got any sleep all night ...I mean at least 10 hours of bashing , banging , tilting , crashing....Really a wild ride. People mentioned 27 foot waves (I am not sure what the biggest was). My children slept through the night, not sure how. Many crew members expressed fear and discomfort. I know this cruise was hard for them, due to the fact that of the 14 days, we ultimately only had 3 port days.

I digress....We are now on day 6...no land for 6 days. The Captain had decided to visit Cape Horn today (around 1) and then tomorrow, visit Ushuaia (translation=stepping off the ship...). We arrived at Cape Horn for viewing at the appointed time, to calm seas.

It was very pretty-a rugged beauty. To tell you the truth, I would have rather had an additional port day, if feasible.



2 of my boys and me at Cape Horn.

Oh, I did forget an interesting part of our journey. On the 6th day, there was a terrible "mob" scene on the stairs in front of guest relations. A truly awful display of immature behavior on the part of many passengers, who were attacking the poor officers about our cancelled port (Falkland Islands) and the failed attempt to go to Antarctica (remember-our original itinerary- 2 scheduled Antarctica days...after Falklands cancellation- 3 days proposed.....and until now, nothing.)

One woman let out the priceless pearl "Well, if you hire a taxi to take you to the airport, and the taxi doesn't take you to the airport, you should get your money back." I guess I don't even need to comment.

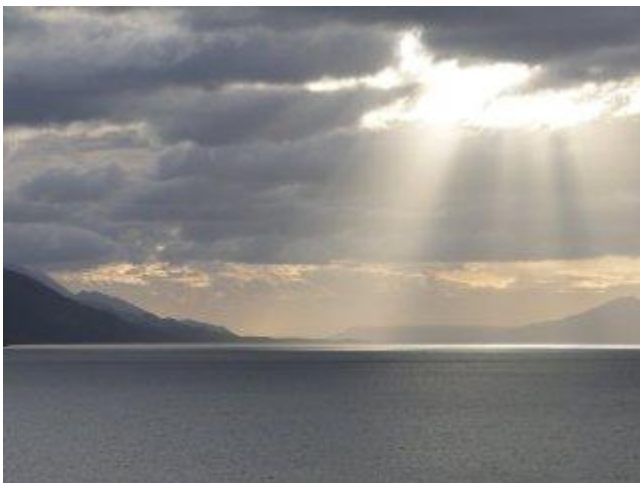


I felt so, so bad for the officers, who were trying, very patiently to explain the weather changes and dangers, but to no avail. And worse, they had to do this all bi-lingually, as there were many Spanish speakers in the crowd. There were more than 50 people in the crowd at one point.... I had heard yelling from the computer center and went to look down on the ruckus.

It was kind of like watching a car accident...you should walk away, but you don't. I felt like yelling down in defense of the crew, but ultimately felt it wouldn't be productive, given the mood of the crowd.

We left off with an angry mob and Cape Horn...the next morning, Saturday the 7th, was to be our first step on land since Sunday's embarkation. The Captain had moved up our visit to Ushuaia.

What a wise Captain. We arrived early. I went out onto our balcony and was greeted by the most beautiful sunrise reflecting on the water.



This sunrise brought with it a perfect day. Really. Tomorrow I'll tell that story.

Ushuaia

Months ahead of time , I'd researched all the alternatives for tours in this port. I decided to contact the firm "Canal Fun" , which specializes in unique experiences tailored to your individual needs.

It was an excellent choice. We were picked up in a van and promptly taken to the marina , where we embarked on our little motor boat , the Rosaura. Our guide was Frederico , an outdoorsy , well spoken young man and our boat "captain" was Beto , a former Olympian!

We cruised down the Beagle Channel , to the traditional Isla de los Lobos , a reserve which protects sea lions , seals and sea birds and to see the famous Les Eclaireurs Lighthouse. We got very close to the wildlife.



Nicholas and Captain Beto

We then continued down the channel , exploring nooks and crannies . There was no one else in sight . We saw a great sunken ship (lot of shipwrecks in this area.)



We then stopped at Martillo Island , a penguin reserve. A stunning setting, with majestic mountains in the backdrop. We saw Gentoos , Magellenic Penguins , and one single , solitary King , who nobody knows how got there.



The solitary King and a friend



Martillo Island

After visiting Martillo Island , we motored along to the famous Estancia Haberton. it was the first ranch founded in Tierra de Fuego (1886) and it is a national historical monument. It is visually stunning.

The tour operators at Canal Fun have an agreement with the owners of the Estancia , and we were allowed to have a picnic in a closed off meadow , with views of the mountains , water and

pebbly beach. The tour guide had brought surprisingly delicious lunches with salami , cheese , sandwiches , brownies and Malbec wine for the adults. It was so lovely.



a ranch building



picnic



part of the estancia

After our picnic , we left our boat behind and drove back to Ushuaia in a minivan , going through the forest. This way , we were offered to perspectives of the area , by land and water. Back in the town , we finished the afternoon having tea and doing some shopping on San Martin Street (a duty free zone). Highly enjoyable.

We tendered back to the ship , tired and satisfied.

We had a sea day next in a second attempt to get us back to Antarctica.

We are now on day 8 , having visited one port (Ushuaia) and having viewed Cape Horn on day 6.

Day 9 is the target , Antarctica. So much has been changed and gone wrong that frankly , I didn't expect us to make it. We were in the midst of such unstable weather systems and we had had so many problems that I wasn't really letting myself hope.

I am an optimist by nature. I tend to look for the positive , but I had resigned myself to trying to enjoy life on board as much as possible and let my expectations lie low. Day 8 presented itself with "weather" again , winds and waves that had become our "new normal". So day 9 , Antarctica didn't look so good. We heard the dreaded "ding dong dang" telling us not to go out on deck etc.

But sometimes, luck is on your side. On day 9 , my husband woke up and looked outside around 4:30 and called to me- "Kim , I can see icebergs....". I literally ran outside and sure enough , there they were. Trying not to sound excessively corny , I got tears in my eyes. My husband told me to get back to sleep for a bit more , but there was NO way I was going to. I sat out on our balcony , contemplating the sunrise as we headed into Paradise Bay.



While sitting out in the quiet silence , I saw a whale right next to our balcony (Aft FV7202). So close , I hollered for the children. They ran out, like Christmas morning, in their pajamas. By then it was 5 ish , so I got them dressed and we went up on deck.

I live in Brazil , today it is over 100 degrees. In other words , we aren't used to the cold. The weather at 5 am in Antarctica was incredible. The first hour and a half on deck, we had no need for hats or gloves. It was crisp , sure...but there was no wind at this time and we were comfortable.



I am trying to use more images than words to convey this wondrous place. It is impossible to find adjectives to describe such perfection . Pristine , untouched , splendid, awe-inspiring. No words can come close to capturing the contrasting , varied shades of blues and whites (who knew there are so many shades of white?).

We saw seals , penguins swimming through the water and on icebergs and humpback whales. As the morning swiftly past and we headed out of the Bay and into the Gerlache Strait , the wind picked out and it became more difficult to stay out on deck. We sought out the shelter of our aft balcony , which offered protection from the wind. We took our mugs of hot chocolate and enjoyed the peace of seeing no pollution , cars , building , man....



I am going to add one more photo , of an expedition ship that was "accompanying" us in Antarctica. It helps have a notion of the scale of the Antarctic beauty.

As we left Antarctica , I felt so blessed. What an incredible gift to be able to see the one place on earth that man hasn't altered. There are rumors that the large cruise ships will be banned from Antarctica by 2011 , due to environmental and safety concern , making this gift all the more special.

My kids can't stop talking about Antarctica and I know I'll never forget it.

Next..Patagonia/Puerto Madryn.

We last left off in Antarctica , headed now for Puerto Madryn . 2 sea days (Considering the fact that we have only gotten off the ship in Ushuaia , we have been on the ship for 10 days.)

Once again , we get an announcement to be prepared for rough seas and bad weather. The Captain has announced a change in our route in order to avoid the worst part of the storm (this

change would affect our arrival and departure time in Port Madryn- arrival and departure would be later by an hour).

Even with this change, we hit a really wild storm, the worst of the trip. My balcony chairs (on deck 7) were flung to the front of the balcony ...don't know if was the motion or a wave. Waves were 27/30 feet high and I can't tell you what the wind force was...it looked like movies of the ocean during a hurricane. Unforgettable to say the least...we didn't sleep , as this lasted all night.

Once in Puerto Madryn , we were met by Felicity , the naturalist who would be accompanying us on our visit to the Peninsula Valdes. We headed in our van to the nature center , where we bought some water , looked at the nice exhibits and then we went on our way to Punta Norte. Punta Norte is the home of sea lions and the giant elephant seals. However , February isn't the best month to view the elephant seals. We saw a few , along with lots of baby seals. Our favorite part of this portion of the trip was the friendly armadillo which lives in the parking area.

We also saw several herds of guanacos during the trip.

After visiting Punta Norte , we drove to the Estancia San Lorenzo , which has a famous Patagonian barbecue and a penguin rookery . Because of issues of a flakey travel company , with which I had done my reservations (far ahead of time I might add) , we almost didn't get into the rookery and we did not get to have lunch.

The rookery was fascinating . Our naturalist gave us amazing details about the penguins. They were so close , we could have just picked one up. The landscape of this area of Patagonia is arid , with low brush , no trees and high winds. There are many sheep being raised in this area. It is rather barren , but ruggedly beautiful in its own way.





My family with the penguins.

It was an interesting day , which required some patience , as a bus broke down on the only road leading out of the rookery. We were forced to wait quite a while to get out , spoiling our plans to visit the city of Puerto Madryn and to have lunch. However , the interaction with the penguins made up for all this.

I want to finish this novel up today! So , we are now at our last port , Montevideo (Uruguay). A nice city , with an intriguing port area. Lots of stunning architecture in the Ciudad Vieja (old city) , which is undergoing renovation. It has a delapidated, decadent look which is charming. The day was hot , and we explored a bit in the morning. We did some shopping , as there were many nice handicrafts. We then opted to lunch at the Mercado Del Puerto , which is famous for the "parrillas" ...barbecues.



After a great lunch , the kids headed back to the ship and I set out on my own to explore a more of the area. I saw majestic squares , visited a museum of decorative arts , went to an antique

market (bought a nice cameo) and visited the cathedral. Several times I was literally the only soul on the deserted streets , which was a bit disconcerting. However , I´d frequently run into "tourist police" , who seemed to be doing a good job.



Palace of Decorative Arts



Cathedral Patio

As the ship sailed away from Montevideo , we swam in the outdoor pools (first and only time!)

and listened to the band.

We arrived in Buenos Aires the next morning. We had a 1:30 flight back home. We left the ship at 9 (smooth) and came out to face the chaotic Buenos Aires terminal. It was the first time in my life I wished I had hired the Celebrity transfer to the airport (\$27 per person). We were met with enormous lines for taxis and a taxi mafia charging absurd rates.

We ended up paying the taxi mob pins (with 3 kids and 6 suitcases....)and had a smooth and uneventful ride to the airport , with plenty of time to spare for our flight.

My last installment will discuss the ship specific aspects 9 not itinerary-specialty dining, entertainment, Fun Factory...and that will be a wrap!

Last installment!

I will leave some thoughts about the ship , dining , crew etc...

First to answer warmwinds question....

There were 2 naturalists on board who gave several talks. I attended 2 of the talks , which were informative and enjoyable (one on the "White Continent" and one on the wildlife of Antarctica.). They did running commentaries when we were in Antarctica , pointing out the wildlife. You could hear these commentaries on deck or on your TV on channel 19.

The waves made us feel queasy on the first couple of days, but after that no problems, even on the bad nights. I was actually surprised by this. We'd take Bonine if we thought it'd get bad and it worked very well.

There are endless activities on board. On sea days , there were language classes (Spanish) , dance classes , trivia , lots of food and wine activities , wii , casino activities(I have never gone to the casino-my friend talked me into playing in a blackjack tournament and I won 2nd place!).

We went to a couple of movies ,slept late, read books , took naps , played games (scrabble and bananagrams!)Went to the t-pool ...in other words , relaxed. All of my other cruises have been very port intensive, so this relaxation was actually nice. I didn't get bored...

I ate way too much . Because there were so many sea days , our lives kind of revolved around mealtimes. We enjoyed eating in the MDR for lunch (I'd never done this) and we tried the Oceanview Bistro for dinner, as well as the SS United States Specialty Restaurant.

The Oceanview Bistro was o.k...the food and ambience were nice , but it was soooooo slow.

The SS United States was wonderful. We´d been to the specialty restaurants on the Summit and on the Constellation too. The decor of the SS United States was the prettiest of all...I´d say the service on the Summit was the best. The famed goat cheese soufflé on the Infinity wasn´t quite as delicious as the other ships. They put this crisscross pastry on top which made it a bit dry.

SS United States



T-Pool

The children had an amazing time at the Fun Factory. The staff was patient , engaging , firm and creative. I was especially happy that my "tween" had so much fun. She´s twelve and she made three great friends on board. They enjoyed "Notes" , the teenage area for recreation. She and her friends were dressed up on pirate day (with the help of the staff) to play with the younger kids.



Pirates On Board!!

I called guest relations at one point to ask if, due to the inclement weather, if there would be a time that we as a family could use the t-pool. There is a clause in the guest manual which talks about this , and under the circumstances , I thought it would be nice. They gave us permission, as long as there were adults present, so we took advantage of that...

The food in the MDR was very good. I had consistently good meals. I dine out a lot and I couldn't find much to fault about the food. A lot of variety to please all tastes. There was only one evening which nothing really appealed to me and we decided to have sushi.

The service was impeccable on all counts.

Problems: Embarkation/Disembarkation (described in the above report)

My friend had a serious noise problem in her CC stateroom , which was really loud and disruptive (wind-balcony door related) It was a really terrible noise and it took a few days to fix correctly..should have been faster.

Photos are too expensive.

I think the communication about the weather /itinerary problems could have been clearer. We'd have long periods without updates , which was a frustrating.

This particular cruise should come with a "warning" letter to passengers about the high possibility of weather related changes...not just in the fine print.

I loved my stateroom, the crew and the food. The trivia was high level and fun. The entertainment was good , liked it better on the Constellation and the Summit.

I welcome any questions or doubts.

P.S Tallyho...I was a Rotary Exchange student who ended up marrying her host brother (10 yrs later!)...funny ,huh? South America is a fantastic place. I am very happy.

We were on the Infinity January 31st. The SS United States has beautiful decor, great service and delicious food. It is really worth the \$35.00 service fee. I'll try to give a "review" through images .We really enjoyed our meal.



Entrance



Interior Photos



Cheese Cart (wonderful!)



Salt and Pepper



Waiter



Wine (there is a great wine list)

Member Name: YF23 Cruise Date: January 2010

Embarkation: Buenos Aires Destination: South America & Antarctica

Celebrity Infinity First Antarctic Cruise – January 2010 Trip Report – Celebrity Infinity First Antarctic Cruise – January 31 – Feb 14, 2010 Summary – This is not your typical cruise. This was an Antarctic adventure, totally different than what was expected by me or planned by Celebrity. The Infinity crew and staff worked hard to keep the passengers informed of changes to the itinerary due to weather.

Day 1 – leaving Buenos Aires Left BA at 5pm. Due to small harbor entrance required assistance of tugs. It took 2 hours to get out of the tight harbor.

Day 2 – At Sea Feb. 1st Foggy all day. Visibility about ¼ mile. Temp in the low 70's. Formal dinner night, but went to the Oceanside bistro and had a good Brazilian BBQ.

Day 3 – Feb 2 (Ground Hog day) Woke to a fog free morning. Mild swell and a few white caps. Saw 3-5 whales blowing at 8am. Temps in the 60's. At 5pm were told that the sea conditions at Stanley, Falklands, were forecasted for 50-60 mph winds with 20 ft seas. Unable to make port. Ship is continuing south to Elephant Island. Current conditions are calm seas, no white caps and very little wind. Went swimming in the afternoon. Had dinner with Allen and Gwyn from the UK. The table next to ours had the ship dancers; they were told when they got on board in BA that the ship was not going to stop in the Falklands. Saw the southern cross and space station go overhead.

Day 4 Stanley, Falklands - Cancelled – Captain is concerned that the weather is getting bad and they don't want to leave people on the beach (tenders are used and Stanley cannot support hundreds of stranded passengers). Weather at noon it was 46 F and visibility about 5 miles with an overcast ceiling of 1000 ft. 8 ft swells with a few whitecaps. Had dinner upstairs at the bistro. An albatross kept us company flying outside the window during dinner. As we reached to the latitude of Cape Horn the seas started to build.

Day 5 – In the Southern Ocean heading to Elephant Island. Last night was rough. The wind was blowing 20-25 kts and the seas were covered with blowing white caps. Woke up to rough seas and blowing snow. Visibility varies from near zero to ½ mile. It's cold outside. Open the balcony door and the temp drops 10 degs in seconds. Noon report weather 50 kts with 15 ft seas. Heavy snow blowing. Elephant Island visit cancelled due to weather. Proceeding on to Antarctica. Apparently a deep low weather system formed and we are in the middle of it. We are about 30 miles from the island but visibility is just several hundred feet. At 4pm we are south of Elephant Island when a new plan is announced. We are going to turn the ship around and go to Cape Horn and Ushuaia, then return to Antarctica when the weather improves. Weather in the Gerlache Strait has reduced visibility (100ft) and strong winds. We are in large swells and strong winds.

Day 6 - In the Southern Ocean heading towards Cape Horn. Woke to party cloudy skies. Still have large swells, but not as windy. Just a few white caps. At 1pm should be at Cape Horn. The

discussion among the passengers is the likelihood of returning to Antarctica on Sun and Monday. I, and many passengers, don't think we will return. But spend more days at sea going slow. Mood is poor. Rounded Cape Horn at 4pm. Weather was great. Large swell but no wind. Then departed for Ushuaia. Arrived at 6am

Day 7 - arrive at Ushuaia at 6am. The city sits in spectacular scenery. Went on a catamaran ride on the Beagle Channel. Saw seals and cormorants. Ship took on 2 tanker trucks of jet fuel. They tell us we will be in Antarctica on Monday. On day six a group of passengers (8 or so) complained about missing the Falkland and turning around. There was a shouting match with the crew. Crew won. They were removed from the ship at Ushuaia and have to find their way home. Their suitcases were lying on the dock when the ship left. Ship left port on time and we are doing 22 knots. Will be out of the Beagle channel at midnight and back in the southern ocean.

Day 8 - Southern Ocean. Woke to large seas and 60 kt winds. The wind is blowing the tops off of the whitecaps. Captain announced that it is going to get rough and to use handrails. All weather decks are closed. Mood on the ship is much improved. At 5pm the weather is 40 kt winds but the seas are the same. Visibility about one mile in fog, ceiling about 500ft. The ships position map has been replaced with an Antarctic map. It doesn't have the speed on the chart but we have been doing over 22 kts at times.

Day 9 Antarctica. Wife woke up at 3:45 am, looked out the window and yelled "iceberg". We are in Antarctica. The seas were dead calm, there was no wind. Unlimited visibility. Quite a contrast from last night. I thought the Antarctic Peninsula would be impressive, but I was wrong. It was Spectacular. Paradise bay was our first landfall. The mountains are thousands of feet tall and covered with glaciers and snow fields 200 – 500 feet thick or more. Ice bergs of different sizes and shapes were in the bay. Saw penguins on the bergs and swimming. Saw leopard seals on a berg. They must have just finished breakfast because there was blood next to them. By 4am the lounge was full of people but they were awestruck since there was dead silence. Went out on deck and it was cold. Below freezing. Bring a warm hat, gloves. There was another ship in the bay with us. A small expedition ship the "Hanseatic". It followed us into the bay and stopped at a research station. At 8am we started up the Gerlache Strait. The mountains on both sides of the ship were incredible with the amount of snow/ice coverage. As we entered the straits we spotted a pod of orca's. They were swimming aggressively so they were probably feeding. Every few miles we would see penguins swimming and humpback whales diving. The mood on the ship went from a quiet disappointment to exuberance. Took about a zillion pictures. It is like no other place on earth. As we were leaving the Gerlache Strait, the weather went from sunshine and unlimited visibility to blowing snow in less than 5 minutes. Everyone is glad the decision was made abandon the first attempt and come back when the weather was better. (Never second guess the captain, he has the big picture.) As we were entering into the southern ocean a sail boat was arriving. Brave souls on that boat. The southern ocean was very rough for the rest of the day and night. 15 foot seas and 40 knot winds. If you ever want to feel what a magnitude 5 earthquake feels like be on the upper decks of a ship in the Drake Passage.

Day 10 – Southern Ocean then South Atlantic Ocean. Woke in the Drake Passage to calmer seas and little wind. Grey and overcast sky. Captains' noon report is predicting 24-28 ft seas and 60 kts winds tonight as we pass the Falkland Islands northbound. The sun came out at noon,

whitecaps and gentle swell. At 5pm they announced that the ship was turning towards the Argentine coast to avoid 30 ft seas and 70 kt winds. It was still calm at 9 pm when we finished dinner. By midnight the ship was in the middle of the weather. It was like a continuous 5.0 earthquake. I looked out one time at 2 am and saw a large white wave level with the deck 9. The ship rose with the wave but it appeared to hit above deck 4. A couple of times the ship shook from strong impacts. Not much sleep since had to concentrate on not being thrown out of bed every few minutes by the rough weather. The Poseidon Adventure entered my mind more than once. It was rough.

Day 11. South Atlantic Ocean. Woke up several times during the night due to rough seas. A lot of banging and crashing of objects during the night. At 8am we are in quarterly following seas. The ocean is covered with wind blowing the tops off the white caps. Wind is still reported as 50 kts and temp is 39. One of our trivia partners said "a wave hit their deck 7 balcony". The shops had some nitnacks come off the shelves. When coffee was brought to the room the attendant said "some of the waves hit as high as deck 7". And that "the staff has been up most of the night because it was so rough". She sounded concern that they were going to repeat this trip next week. Noon update has us arriving at Puerto Madryn at 8 am or an hour late. Weather in the afternoon was 5 ft waves and 30 kt winds.

Day 12 – Puerto Madyrn. Arrived an hour late. Docked at the aluminum factory dock. Not bad timing since we left paradise bay and detoured to avoid the storm. Day 12 and our second port day. Even the crew was tired of being on the ship so long. Weather is 75 and calm winds. Off to see a penguin rookery. Just got back from the Punta Tombo penguin rookery. 2 hours each way across Patagonia. Not a tree in sight. If you like the high desert, you will love Patagonia. Spent 2 hr watching about a zillion penguins. They were everywhere. Not afraid of humans. Worth the drive. Got back to the ship an hour before sailing.

Day 13 - at sea heading towards Montevideo. 5 ft swells, few white caps. The attendant who told us she was concerned about the next trip back down to Antarctica is "leaving the ship at BA". I was told by another passenger that "divers checked out the ship, and Lloyd's had cleared the ship to sail." I think a lot of people were concerned about the rough weather we encountered. I think the Captain was on top of weather situations. He detoured to avoid the worst of the weather and the ship rode well even through it was very rough at times.

Day 14 – Montevideo. This is the only stop on the brochure that is per plan. Weather is humid and 80F, no wind. Ship is taking on fresh fruit and unloading damaged deck chairs and repairing damaged lifeboats. Went on a winery tour, It was quite good and worth the price. Day 15. Off the boat in BA. We get off at 8:15, flight is at 7pm. The crew was replacing 3 broken windows on a tender with sheet metal, which was damaged on day 11. The tenders are stored on deck 5. Arrived at EZE at 9am. The departure building is modern and full for a Sunday morning. Met another couple from deck 6 and they said that a wave hit their balcony during the night of day 11. It was a good storm. Highlight Crossed southern ocean 4 times, spent a day cruising the Antarctic Peninsula, when through big storm. Had a great time. Not your typical cruise.

► Publication Date: 02/19/10

Infinity on Jan 31,2010 [cruisinghobby](#)

I was on this cruise too. It was pure hell. From standing in the rain for 2 hours and all of our luggage and clothes wet and that's just the beginning. Our furniture should have been thrown overboard it was so dirty and uncomfortable. We were on the so called Concierge Class BC deck 7. The balcony was very, very small plus dirty. The closet was not big enough for 2 people for 2 weeks with 2 different climates and 3 formal nights. Of course mother nature did not help out any. We did not make Falkland Island, this is my second try with Celebrity on the Mellinuem on 2006 we also did not make Puerto Madryn, Arg, either on that trip. The only thing they did try to do is to take us back to Antarctica. Did I mention we were almost there and changed course again. I guess we were fortunate enough to make Cape Horn which is no big deal, just another sea day after 9 days at sea it was nice to see land. We made it to Ushuaia, Arg. Thank God. We did finally make Antarctica, but only Paradise Bay and then as fast as he could go in the Gerlache Strait. So fast we could barely take pictures. We then proceeded to cruise into 90 mph winds and 38 ft seas so we could get to Puerto Madryn. Guess what we went in front of the low, instead behind it. So the whole night was absolutely the scariest cruise I have ever been on. We were one hour late making Puerto Madryn, Arg. The Captain continually talked about safety for the passengers. He just needed to get us to the expensive excursions waiting for us there at Puerto Madryn. the rest of the cruise was a big 0

Celebrity Infinity Cruise Review by moraira

Antarctica on the Infinity - 31 Jan 2010 We travelled on the 14 day cruise to "Falklands, Elephant Island, Antarctica, Cape Horn, Ushuaia, Puerto Madryn, Montevideo and Buenos Aires departing BA on 31 Jan 2010. In the end bad weather ruled out Falklands, Elephant Island, and 4 crossings of the Drake Passage yielded 6 hours in Antarctica.

An interesting cruise, which was not, as others have said, your "typical" cruise. For a start it was only 30% US citizens, the balance of 70% of passengers being strong contingents of Germans, Spanish speakers, and Europeans from a myriad of countries. And the majority were there to do what the cruise appeared to promise, that is to "see Antarctica". In other words the "normal" cruise delights of shopping, bingo, one arm bandits in the casino, and so on, were not what they were looking for. They wanted the destinations, the Falklands. Elephant Island and Antarctica.

This was the rub, Celebrity were completely unable to deal with the split between the aspirations of the US passengers (I use the term in its generality), by and large happy with cruising and the majority of other nations who had booked to see the destinations and the cruising was by the by. The upshot was we missed reaching the Falklands because of the weather - it was not just another port of call for the Argentineans wanting to visit the war graves of the family, and not having any other way of getting there. And we faced missing or at best having 6 hours in Antarctica. The communications of the facts surrounding the cancellation and/or amendments to our itinerary were not made by the Captain, but by the Entertainments Manager (we were later told that the Captain's English was not good enough for him to have made the announcements). Further we later learned that the Captain had virtually no power to make any decisions himself over course changes, and that Miami had to make the calls. The problem was that, whilst I would agree that changes have to be made for weather, the way in which the passengers were told, overlooked that the majority of passengers were there to see Antarctica and the Falklands, and had there been reasonable doubt about the ship getting into those two places when we booked, then we would not have booked. The Falklands and Antarctica were not any two ports, they were the reason for booking. In short communication with passengers was appalling. They actually went further and deliberately (I learnt later from the hotel director) removed the TV GPS chart to disguise the fact that the ship had changed course hours before passengers were told what was happening. The Entertainment Manager blithely telling us in his best bingo voice that it was for our own good, and with no back up of charts, really was not the way to tell the ship's passengers.

There was in fact a major "mutiny" by around 250 Spanish speaking guests. An impromptu public gathering in the main foyer led to the ship trying to stop other passengers getting wind of what was going on by organizing a second public meeting in Spanish lasted 2 hours in the Constellation Lounge with the Captain and the Hotel Director trying to calm the crowd. The upshot appears to have been that around 8 of the Spaniards were expelled from the ship a few days later - under some obscure section of Celebrity rules that passengers have to agree to when they book. So literally hundreds of very angry Spanish speaking guests aboard. I later attended a Cruise Critic meeting on the ship, and most there were US guests, who were happy with the cruise and the way it was handled. I have photographs of the two public meeting with the Spanish. Closest to a lynch mob that I have seen, and very badly handled by the ship.

The upshot to me appeared the majority of US citizens were happy with the cruise, and the majority of non-US citizens were not happy. No doubt there was a minority in either camp too.

We had a number of other problems on the cruise. I shall detail the problems we had. There were other things that were good, but on completing the cruise, apart from wonderful memories of Paradise Bay in Antarctica and the Penguin colony outside Puerto Madryn, it is the bad points that stick. And I will use by space here to highlight those problems.

1. Check in was chaos. Over an hour, much standing outside in the rain, to finally get on board. The ship's excuse to me was "too many people arrived at once". Not good enough Celebrity.

2. Boat drill on day one was chaos. We were kept packed into a lounge for over half an hour, without an explanation, and nothing happening. Later we were told that a passenger in another lounge had been taken ill. One wonders what would have happened if the ship had been sinking. Not good enough Celebrity. Others could well have become ill standing for that time in a hot, overcrowded lounge.

3. Leaving the ship in BA at the end of the cruise was chaos. Celebrity abandoned 2000 passengers in an old warehouse where we had to pick up our bags. We were told that the only way out was by taxi, and that it was illegal to try to walk out. Upshot was that the "official" taxi dispatcher charged a minimum of US\$25 for a fare that was officially set at US\$10. Say 700 taxis at \$15 profit per taxi is a tidy \$10,000 cash profit on the ship. You either paid, or you did not get a taxi. Nobody from Celebrity was on hand, they had washed their hands of the entire ship's passengers once we left the ship. Not good enough Celebrity.

4. Shore excursions were overpriced. One has come to expect that of Cruise lines. But this tended to be on an even more "grab the money" scale than I have seen with other cruise ships. Although we never got to the Falklands in the ends, the Falklands excursions were criminally overpriced, and it was virtually impossible to get private excursions, as Celebrity have the local operators and the Tourist Board sewn up - they are all too scared to speak up, in case Celebrity go elsewhere. We got round the problem by renting a car in Ushuaia and Puerto Madryn at a fraction of the Celebrity price. Not good enough Celebrity.

5. The entertainment was poor in the "stage show" in the evening. In addition, of the two speakers for the big theatre daily talks, one in particular, was merely badly rolling out talks given by him years ago. A tired presentation from a tired man. He should be quietly retired before being let loose on other cruises. Not good enough Celebrity.

6. Celebrity refused point blank to publicize passengers who wanted to organize Bridge on a daily basis. 30 to 40 turned up each day for Bridge without the sessions being advertised either in the daily program or notice board. We asked for publicity, Celebrity refused. By they were happy to continue to publicize and organize their own shuffleboard, darts and table tennis competitions when nobody could attend them as the decks were close for gales. We were NOT asking for a Cruise Direct, we were asking that passengers on the ships should be informed of where they could play Bridge. Not good enough Celebrity.

7. The SS United States restaurant has serious flaws. Too many waiters and not enough cooks, led to horrors like our Lobster Thermidor turning out to be a previously made lobster stew served in a much re-cycled lobster shell, and not cooked for us. And a flambéed crepe dessert, having the pomp of a waiter doing the flambéing at the table, but serving the resultant hot sauce in a stone cold crepe, that he admitted had been made several hours previously. Pretentious is the word I would use for this premium restaurant. Not good enough Celebrity.

8. Apart from the coffee that you could buy in the specialty cafe, everywhere else in the ship coffee was over-brewed and not worth drinking. Celebrity's explanation was that Americans (remembers that only 30% were this) liked mild coffee. My response was that Starbucks appeared to give Americans a coffee that was drinkable, so why could not Celebrity. They thanked me for my input and assured me that my observations would be passed to head office. I would put money on undrinkable coffee continuing to be served for years to come on Celebrity. Not good enough Celebrity.

9. A on a personal level, the marketing hype for us being in a suite was not delivered. The hype promises "Priority check-in and departing". There was no priority queue for suites when we boarded, just the scrum in the rain for everyone, and on leaving we had asked for late check out, but the letter delivered to our cabin instructed us to leave the ship at 7.45am. Not good enough Celebrity.

In the end did I enjoy seeing Antarctica, all be it for only 6 hours. I did enjoy eating in the "normal" evening restaurant. I was very pleased with the service I received from individual members of the crew. I did enjoy seeing the Megallenic Penguin colony outside Puerto Madryn.

But would I travel on Celebrity again? Answer to that has to be NO WAY. Celebrity do not know or understand non US passengers. No doubt they managed to hit the button with some, but failed for the majority. They were ill advised to try to offer an Antarctic trip to "international travelers", when in fact they were aiming at primarily "US Cruisers". This not a criticism of US Cruisers, but a statement that they are wanting something different on the Celebrity Infinity to the travelers.

►Publication Date: 02/21/10

Celebrity Infinity Cruise Review by MICHAEL RICH

The ride of the valkeries with an experienced captain! We joined the ship after 3 days/nights in Buenos Aires. We had seen most of what the city had to offer, albeit briefly, and had experienced the Argentinean tango at first hand in Cafe Tortoni, the oldest in the city; if ever the term erotic can be used in dancing this is where!! After paying our dues at the grave of Evita, we walked - very slowly, in the highest temperatures the city had experienced for many years - up to the Japanese and botanical gardens to relax with a necessary ice cream.

Buenos Aires is still third world in many parts and taxi drivers delight in ripping off their passengers - even when there is a meter! Public transport is cheap and plentiful and the subway seemed safe enough to us. You have to ignore the many beggars as it is not your city and so you can never tell which are genuine. The main shopping streets are pedestrianised and the malls are worth a visit; however, do not expect bargains - even at sale prices!

We joined the Infinity by taxi from our very good hotel, the Marriot Plaza, situated conveniently for access to all areas and not far from the port - our taxi driver however, had no idea what to charge us and flagged down another taxi to ask!! We did better than our table companions who were (they believe deliberately) dropped at the wrong terminal and were threatened with violence if they did not pay extra! Fortunately, an American passenger who was passing in another taxi stopped and provided them with additional funds to reach their destination - they were Australian and unfortunately they had not allowed for additional pesos. I know they paid the Good Samaritan back after some detective work by Celebrity Infinity's Guest Relations. Perhaps the sourest note on the whole cruise experience was the embarkation as it was handled by very inept locals who required passengers to carry their own baggage into the terminal whilst rain drenched the line - Infinity's excellent Hotel Director was ashamed and angry at the way we had been treated but could only apologize as it was Argentina's port staff not the ship's who created the problem. This was not an excuse but genuine remorse and she vowed to make it known to their home office in the strongest possible terms.

This attitude by officers and crew typified the voyage. They were the happiest crew and officers we have come across in our 14 cruises and they deserve many accolades as they were subjected, very unfairly, to enormous abuse by the Latin American passengers. The reason? Well, these were the stormiest seas we have encountered on any ship and the Captain had to avoid our first port of call at The Falklands to sail away from enormous waves and strong winds in the area BUT worse was to follow as the same problem prevented us from visiting Elephant Island and the beauties of Antarctica!

We sailed on to the supposed stormy Cape Horn where to sea was like a mill pond! We gratefully sought out land in Ushuaia and saw penguins, sea lions and many sea birds in the Beagle Channel, followed by a tour of the (disappointing) Tierra del Fuego National Park - although those who hiked up to the Glacier from the chair lift, said it was wonderful; obviously choose tours carefully!

Then a surprise!! It was announced that the Captain believed the weather sufficiently safe to retrace our steps to Antarctica so we would all (crew included, as this was to be their first experience too) get to see the magic of that glorious, breathtaking area. So on we sailed, rough seas but who cared as we were to achieve sights so few in the world had experience. And so it was that we arrived at Paradise Island and sailed slowly around taking in the animals enjoying an ice floe or two (was that solitary penguin waving to us?) and the whales presenting their flukes to us on many occasions as they dived for food - the water was calm and blue and our breaths were frozen on the air as we could not get enough of this amazing, largely unexplored land.

The two wildlife presenters onboard gave us a running commentary and caused much running from side to side to observe new sights in the peaceful world of Antarctica. We sailed away with regrets at our short stay but filled with a new sense of wonder for Mother Nature. We then visited Puerto Madryn where much wildlife can be seen, although a word of warning to those who believe whales can be sighted here - it is not the right time of year as they appear around April not when most cruise ships visit, at least that is what we were told at the Eccocentre. A nice little town of limited resources for shopping but the promenade and beach are worth a visit, if not taking one of the wildlife tours available. So we sailed on up the coast of Argentina, across the River Plate.

We arrived at Montevideo the day before disembarkation in Buenos Aires but few could enjoy the city due to the very high humidity levels, although the cool and wonderful interior of the Cathedral presented a reason for visiting. Much of this city shows its small third world underfunded infrastructure with very uneven and broken paving to trap the unwary.

Disembarkation should have been a dream after the initial experience but again, if not taking a Celebrity tour or transfer, taxis were the only means of reaching hotels and they charged accordingly with the minimum of US\$25 plus a long wait to be offered a vehicle at an offer, as the saying goes, you could not refuse.

We finished with an extra day in Buenos Aires, meeting and eating with new friends from the ship and the overall experience was to realize that more sea days equals more conversations and new interests although it proved a big ask for the activities team onboard but principally, we had seen that wonder of the world which is Antarctica, perhaps only scratching the surface of a vast continent but seen we had and we shall never forget how different it is from Alaska and why superb Captains like our Capt. Margaritas are so revered in the maritime world. GO VISIT while you can!!

► Read the [South America & Antarctica ports review](#) by MICHAEL RICH

► Publication Date: 02/17/10

Celebrity Infinity Cruise Review by Enrico Caruso

Antarctica (nearly missed) For a start, to call "Antarctic" a 14-night cruise with only 2 days in Antarctica (or, more correctly, only one day, because Elephant Island is in fact in the South Shetlands) was a little bit questionable - however the magic of the word "Antarctica" was such that 2,000 people from all over the World bought this cruise just to have a glimpse of it.

As the Captain said during his speech at first formal night this particular cruise to Antarctica was the first for Celebrity and Infinity - so, "no promises could be made".

I quite agree - the weather in Antarctic region is unpredictable so nobody can guarantee that any ship would make it to Antarctica, even in the middle of summer (February). Having said that, presumably if somebody sending a Caribbean cruiser to Antarctica it would have significantly lower chance to make it rather than an "ice-class" ship.

The bottom line: both the Falklands and the Elephant islands were cancelled, the ship had to go to Ushuaia instead, then it turned South again and eventually made it to Antarctica - just for 6 hours... (out of 14 days)...

An explanation was given that the weather was "unusually" bad - something is difficult to believe. I am not criticizing the captain's decision to turn back - safety is paramount, etc. - however, in my humble opinion, that was exactly the kind of weather one would expect in Antarctica - the weather a Caribbean cruiser like Infinity was not designed for. That is a problem.

A couple of other points, relatively minor in comparison. Check-in was a bit chaotic, it took 1,5 hours with people queuing while raining outside a temporary tent set by Celebrity. The tent was in the middle of nowhere in the Commercial port - as a result the taxis could charge double for a trip to the airport. Celebrity seemed to turn a blind eye on that and did not arrange any transportation between the airport and place of embarkation (even exact address of embarkation was not provided - as a result many people ended up in a wrong pier 2 km away.

Shore excursions were overpriced, sometimes as much twice in comparison to what you could easily get locally.

There was certain lack of information about few ports we visited. For example, nobody told us that there was a low season in Peninsula Valdes - so instead of whales and orcas all you could possibly see (after a 250 km journey on dust road) was a sea lions colony.

An entertainment on-board was below expectations - Argentinean tango dancers who were invited to perform last night of the cruise looked by far more professional than ship's "local" American dance group.

For such cold weather condition there were not enough sitting areas available inside the ship. Those areas that were available were often "smoking allowed" so unsuitable for children and people with health problems.

On a positive side: a good cabin (although with very old TV) with good bed (but bad pillow). Excellent room service.

Food: I would rate it between adequate and good for breakfast and lunch to between good and excellent for dinner. Good waiters' service.

Interesting (although a bit odd) selection of books in the library.

Celebrity Infinity Cruise Review by shackleton

going south goes west When we arrived in Buenos Aires we were met by a couple of young ladies who were rather outnumbered by the size of the party they had to co-ordinate but eventually we were delivered to the hotel. We were surprised how nice it looked but were assured it was ours, we unloaded our own luggage, the transport left and yes, it was the wrong hotel! It only took about another hour to get collected and re-delivered but after travelling for around 18 hours it was a little frustrating. The NH City & Tower hotel was pleasant but the lack of English gave the impression (as the Internet review stated) that staff were surly and uncommunicative.

Next day we went to the ship. We were delivered to a rather dilapidated building with a kind of marquee inside, which housed Celebrity's check-in staff. These girls just did not know what was going on – they had no clue about cabin grades or fast-passes and the queues were massive and confused, the temperatures inside were hot and humid. Not so outside – the huge queues along the dockside were standing in torrential rain! We eventually got checked-in, after we discovered we were in the wrong line and sorted ourselves out. Then the queue was halted again by the insistent company photographers who had a “they shall not pass” philosophy not appreciated by those hundreds still in the rain – you should see some of those photos – drenched to the skin, bedraggled, hair plastered over dripping faces. Several people were ill with colds and chills etc afterwards.

We first realized that all was not well when we did the boat drill. Clearly most of the crew hadn't a clue what to do! We were marched down many flights of stairs and crowded into a public area, hot humid and claustrophobic as we were pushed back against the wall. That was when the lady collapsed. Now we had a real emergency the emergency drill came apart, we were marched away into another part of the ship; Once the ill lady was taken away we were marched back again, hot, sweating, trying not to faint. Then we were marched up on deck and shouted at to get in line. At last it was all over – it had taken well over an hour and a half, no-one felt reassured!

Then it got worse, if that's possible. Captain Margaritis introduced himself at the theatre. His pidgin English line was “This is the first time we've done this, we'll do our best – but no promises!” £8,500 down and “no promises” – what happened to “It's all about you”?

We quickly learned why he said that. Our first port of call, Stanley in the Falklands, was cancelled due to bad weather. This was the place we had all come to see (including a big Argentinean contingent) the only place with King penguins, our once-in-a-lifetime ambition, peoples' Christmas gifts, anniversary 'specials' – wiped away by the first of the Cruise Directors smarmy announcements.

What was 'Plan B' we wanted to know, when would we go there, on the way back? What plans were there for a revised schedule etc? Answer – there were no plans! No-one on board seemed to have the slightest intimation of the massive degree of ill-will and bad feeling generated by this cavalier attitude, some ladies simply burst into tears. The Argentineans, however, soon made it

clear – you may already know about the near riot that ensued (they were intending to visit war graves)

I know the small print says “Itinerary subject to change, Captain’s decision final” – the Isle of Wight ferry has that disclaimer too! This is my major point of issue with Celebrity - where in the cruise description or any of the pre-cruise literature, excursions or descriptions, is there the tiniest intimation that it’s hard to get into Stanley? It’s absolutely no good the so-called Cruise Director blithely telling us that of the last 8 attempts to do so, 3 were failures – it’s a bit late then, isn’t it? Secondly, given this knowledge, what contingency plans exist to fulfill the promised itinerary? None - this is now the “No promises cruise line!” We had 4 written warnings that the road in Peninsular Valdes was bumpy and may be dusty – we got no warning at all about the hazards of actually getting to our ports of call. Celebrity must be in an unparalleled position to give us an accurate assessment of the chances of getting to Stanley in terms of % success in the past, then we could make an informed decision.

Would we change the route as other ships did and go to visit some mainland port of call, to later return their delighted passengers to the Falklands? No, Infinity sets sail for the Drake Passage, ‘the worst seas in the world’, sailing on calm seas at a much-remarked snail’s pace. (Throughout the cruise all the passengers failed to understand the slow pace) So we are across the Drake Passage en route to Elephant Island and are ‘promised’ a three day visit to the Antarctic – we all felt that was a worthy compensation, but this is the line that doesn’t make or keep promises!

We got to dread that sickly voice of the Cruise Director as he demolished our holiday bit by bit. There’s bad weather apparently so we’re not going after all (the concept of weather forecasting seems to have eluded this crew, they’re always surprised; by now most passengers felt that you really should keep this Captain in his comfort zone – probably no further south than the Mediterranean or Caribbean – he certainly doesn’t belong in the South Atlantic!)

Many passengers were very interested in our route, dozens carried GPS equipment and some even had compasses and charts – so we already knew that the ship had turned 180 degrees and was now sailing North – back through the Drake Passage. This was the time when the TV page showing the ship’s position was blocked, and the announcement wasn’t made for another 3 hours! The Captains letter of apology (so far 0 out of 2) states that the area was “experiencing unusually bad weather... high winds... icy conditions... very unusual” but Celebrity’s own description of Elephant Island says “typical weather – foggy, snowy and with a relentless “breeze” – a bit rough”

We’re going to Cape Horn, then Ushuaia where the Argentines at last are able to abandon ship! We’ve been at sea for 6 days – Transatlantic is shorter! Then we’re going – guess where – through the Drake Passage again (the 3rd time) to the Antarctic where we’ll spend a whole six hours! Will we see Elephant Island as it’s sort-of on the way – of course not!

So a day later we’re going back through the Drake Passage for the 4th time – this must be a record. The time that we had due to our cancelled ports of call has now been squandered completely by sailing back and forth like the Marie Celeste – what did we see – we saw the sea!

In light of all this you may think this bit is trivial but it illustrates my grouse about your advertising. Another of my life's ambitions was to see Elephant seals so we booked to go to Peninsular Valdez. The excursion blurb which I read at home makes much of "mature bulls ...measuring up to 20' long and weighing over 3 tons" and of "killer whales that are often seen hunting in the area". Once we've booked, paid and are on board we read that the colony is "mostly females...males are a rare sight" The guide told us that in 13 years she had seen Orcas on 3 occasions – does that sound 'often' to you,? I think it's close to 'obtaining money under false pretences'.

Our dinner at the Specialty Restaurant was outstanding; the downside was that it made a sad contrast with the generally mediocre food in the main restaurant – the menus disjointed, the food excellent in description only, unco-ordinated and not a patch on our Mercury experience of some years ago. Are they economizing?

Finally, came the time to leave. We were told the disembarkation times and made our plans. An hour ahead of schedule we were told we could leave; we rushed ashore - then sat in the coaches for that hour until everybody at Breakfast arrived. We were taken to the airport and your rep showed us our luggage. We thought he might help us find the check-in but he was gone. We milled around for a couple of hours until some staff came and told us what to do.

I spoke with lots of people with whom we shared a table, English, Irish, Americans, Canadians, Germans, French, Belgians, Chinese, Japanese, Swedes, Norwegians, even a Russian – they all said they would NEVER sail with Celebrity again!

Celebrity Infinity Cruise Review by darkjay

All is forgiven - except embarkation! We arrived in Buenos Aires a day early in order to see a bit of the city and to try to recover from a series of flights (17 hours air time plus five more hours waiting in terminals). We stayed at a small boutique hotel called the Recoleta Guesthouse. We were well treated and the location was such that we could walk to several tourist sites. It is also reasonably close to a subway station if you are so inclined. The Recoleta people arranged for transportation to a tango show (glad we went but I don't care if I ever see another one - my wife probably disagrees!) and, the next day, for a cab to the terminal. And thus our cruise adventure began!

Embarkation: This was our first cruise on Celebrity and our 13th in total. We had always assumed that Celebrity was somewhat upscale from its sister line, Royal Caribbean, on which we had sailed five times and we looked forward to the experience and the destinations. Alas, our first impressions were not positive. The embarkation experience was terrible! After finally finding the correct place, our cabbie - who incidentally did NOT try to extort any extra money and seemed embarrassed by the confusion - dropped us off at the end of a long line in front of a warehouse. This line progressed slowly to a luggage drop-off area whereupon you returned outside to yet another line. Passengers eventually worked their way to various crowded service desks and, once again, reversed course, this time crossing a queue and walking through an opening in a large metal wall that divided the warehouse in two. And what was on the other side? A large empty room. So while people were standing in the rain getting soaked, there was a large, dry room available. (Actually, Celebrity does use this space as the post-cruise luggage pick up area.) Then, onto a bus for the kilometer long ride to the ship and yet another line and another soaking from the rain. Really, Celebrity. You are supposed to be experts in queue management but you've obviously forgotten at least two simple rules. Never have people walking in reverse directions in the same queue and, if at all possible, avoid queues crossing. Both are invitations to line jumping of which there were numerous examples.

The Infinity: When we first booked the cruise, I was curious as to what I might expect from a ship of that size (1950 passengers, 91,000 tons) and age (launched in 2001). As it happens we had sailed on the Brilliance of the Seas (2500 passengers, 90,000 tons with a 2002 launch date) and the Carnival Spirit (2670 passengers, 89,000 tons, also launched in 2001). With its size advantage and fewer passengers, one would expect better service and, for the most part, Celebrity delivered. The ship itself doesn't have the WOW factor of the Brilliance but it is comfortable and easy to get around. I understand that the Infinity has a major refurbishing scheduled and not a moment too soon - it is definitely showing its age. .

Our cabin (2015) was an interior and obviously low in the ship. My parsimonious nature paid a good return as our location offered a relatively smooth ride on some of the heaviest seas we had ever encountered. Cabin 2015 is slightly undersized relative to others but quite comfortable with the exception of the pillows which were very thin and hard. Attention Celebrity: steal some pillows from Holland America or, at least, their idea of offering a choice of pillow firmness. This does not have to wait for the refurbish - do it now. Consistent with the rest of the ship, our facilities were in need of attention, especially the shower. The toilet seat was so scratched as to invite speculation that it was stolen from an outhouse at a fishing camp in northern Quebec. We

were unable to control the room's temperature but the eventual installation of a new water regulator solved this problem.

The Food The dining room and buffet offered excellent food both in terms of quality and variety. Of my 14 dinners in the dining room, only two were mediocre - a seafood medley that was overcooked and a sirloin steak that was trying to masquerade as filet mignon but was way too tough. My wife commented to our waiter (Cedric) about the relative shortage of vegetables on her main course. Within a few minutes, Cedric appeared with a plate filled with carrots, broccoli, and asparagus, all cooked to perfection. A similar plate appeared automatically every night - nice touch! Cedric and Abdul served us well.

Entertainment If you like music, this was the cruise for you. In addition to the house band, there were at least three other groups and two solo acts (piano and guitar) on board for the full voyage. Each was very good in their own way with my favorite being the Latin American group who played in the Constellation Lounge. In addition, guest performers included a classical violinist, a classical pianist, a singer, and a comedian who was very good but only put on one show. The ship's entertainment group was excellent in putting on four different programs plus a couple of short appearances. One other note, there were two guest speakers, a geologist and a naturalist, who gave numerous talks. Both were excellent and attracted large audiences.

The Itinerary This cruise was eventful. After leaving Buenos Aires, we sailed for the Falkland Islands. Unfortunately, we were told that fog and high seas would prevent the operation of tenders and that we would skip this stop. We were very disappointed as we had hoped to see this remote part of the world (but, I'll bet, not nearly so disappointed as the passenger who lugged an extra suitcase to drop off at the brother of a neighbor back home). So on to Elephant Island. Or not. More high seas and the decision was made to divert to Ushuaia several days earlier than expected. This decision touched off some very loud complaints and suddenly, security guards were evident throughout the ship - something we had never noticed on previous cruises. I befriended one guard and later asked if the rumor was true that a number of passengers had been kicked off the ship in Ushuaia. He smiled and said that Celebrity would never take such action but that several passengers had left for medical reasons and several others left due to "itinerary changes."

Fortunately the weather in Antarctica cleared up and we set sail (is that still an appropriate phrase?) to Paradise Bay and the Gerlache Strait. The six hours we sailed these waters were magical with enough ice bergs, whales, penguins, and seals to last a lifetime. I suppose our acquaintance with Antarctica is the equivalent of someone from Japan sailing around Alcatraz and saying that they had seen the United States but it was great nonetheless.

Off to Puerto Madryn and the penguin rookery. Due to a warning of poor road conditions and fearing a breakdown of local transportation, we decided to play it safe and go with the ship's tour. One advantage of taking a tour rather than hiring a cab is the knowledge obtained from the tour guide. In our case, we had a young school teacher who did a great job. BTW, the roads were actually pretty good.. Oh - and we did see magellanic penguins. Thousands of them. Puerto Madryn is clearly not set up for tour ships - the local retailers were closed from one o'clock until

three or so and there was not a single Diamonds International in sight :-) The countryside is a near desert with plastic bags and other bits of garbage stuck on every bush.

So sailing north along the coast of Argentina should put us out of the rough weather, right? Nope. In our path was a strong low pressure system that gave us our highest waves yet despite the fact that the ship diverted from its intended route. Of course, a late evening dessert buffet was scheduled and was highlighted by staff hanging on to the ice sculptures for dear life. I actually felt some sympathy for Celebrity. Many passengers were most unreasonable in their complaints as if Celebrity somehow controlled the weather. The various diversions and the heavy use of the ship's stabilizers undoubtedly ran up their fuel bill substantially. And they certainly didn't make much on their casino operations. The total slot payout for the entire 14 days was under \$100,000. Our cruise on the Liberty (with twice as many passengers but only 7 days long) totaled \$1.4 million. Perhaps that is why there were no refunds or 'make-ups' for missed ports, something we did experience on previous cruises.

Montevideo at last. We walked around, visited several "leather factories" and a large facility with perhaps a dozen barbecue restaurants. Real tourist stuff in what seems like an interesting city.

Other Kudos: - I suspect the staff has a "six foot rule" as anyone associated with the ship - entertainers, officers, crew - greeted you warmly regardless of where you encountered them. - the staff in the photography shop were most helpful. They would show you how to use your camera, charge batteries, etc. They also produced a great cruise DVD that focused on scenery rather than belly flopping contests. They were rewarded for their efforts by selling close to 600 copies, an all time high for the Infinity. Other Quibbles: - a complaint that I think I have had on every cruise is that the main lounge, the Constellation on the Infinity, is not smoke free. On several occasions, we tried to spend some time in the lounge but were forced to retreat. This was also the venue where they held the ballroom dance classes for some reason (BTW, Katie and Craig from the dance troupe did a great job as teachers) leading to some new dance moves as you tried to wave away the smoke. The spittoons are gone, so why not the ash trays? - the ship's art collection is abysmal (don't bother going to the garage sale!) - the TV in our cabin was so old that I think it ran on kerosene. No big deal as we didn't watch it much anyway but it did seem out of place. - the clocks on the promenade deck were operating but always at the wrong time. If you can't keep a clock running properly

Some Tips for New Cruisers. Cruise Fact #1: you will never see these people again. Cruise Fact #2: you paid good money for this cruise, you deserve a good return.

Let's start with deck chairs. Not all deck chairs are created equal. Here are some tips to ensure that you get your fair share of the premium locations. Go to the library and grab a book at random. Any book will do. Do NOT sign out the book because if you do they will expect you to return it. As early as you are able, go to the pool area and spread a towel or two on the desired deck chairs. Open the book and lay it on the chair. A rumpled t-shirt is also a nice touch. Now, go to the buffet and commandeer a prime table. Have a leisurely breakfast - at least two hours. Ignore those people walking around with trays looking for a place to sit. Remember the two cruise facts - and besides, it is not your fault that the ship designers undersized the restaurant. After breakfast, wander down to the shops and see what is going on sale today. Then spend some

time looking for your pics in the photo gallery. Are you now ready for a swim? Your deck chair is waiting for you - unless some rude person has moved your stuff.

Experienced cruisers can also be spotted in the theatre shows. These events offer a great time to catch up on your text messages. This will annoy other guests but don't worry about it - read the cruise facts again. Oh. You can ignore the cruise director's suggestion that you do not use flash photography. Flash away! They never kick anybody out of the theatre. If someone actually does say something, well, just shrug and pretend you don't speak English. Love these international cruises.

If you enjoyed these tips, buy my book (and I hope you know I am joking).

▶ Publication Date: 02/23/10

Celebrity Infinity Cruise Review by KruseT

Majestic Antarctic! This was an unusual cruise, to say the least. The Antarctic is known for its primeval beauty, and its fierce storms, and we encountered both. I would NOT recommend this cruise for first-timers. Though this ship was scheduled to stop in the Falkland Islands, Ushuaia (Argentina-Tierra Del Fuego), Puerto Madryn (Argentina), and Montevideo (Uruguay), the main attraction was being able to cast one's eyes on the Antarctic continent close-up (can't set foot on it).

I have been on some fifteen cruises. This was the second one with Celebrity (curiously, had the same band leader and ship's doctor as previous cruise in Australia). We expected and received the courteous, considerate, and highly competent service from our stateroom steward, waiter, and busboy. Typically, Celebrity's style is more subdued and sophisticated than Carnival/Princess, etc.

This was Celebrity's (and the Captain's) first venture to Antarctica. This voyage was plagued with extremely stormy weather that prevented stopping at the Falklands, Elephant Island, and curtailed our Antarctic visit to a mere six hours or so. We had to dodge some of the violent weather this region is known for, but still got whipped with 50 mph blizzards and high seas. I had purposely reserved a room low in the ship and amidships to minimize ship movement (I am prone to motion sickness). I can truthfully say I never became more than just a little queasy, and that was in the theater at the very front of the ship on the most violent night. I was surprised but delighted. The Captain had to change course several times to avoid the worst of the storms, and I'm sure the Infinity used up a lot more fuel than usual. That being said, Antarctica is breathtakingly beautiful, majestic, and bountiful with wildlife. Penguins, whales, sea lions, sea birds, and the quiet whiteness are a sight few people actually witness. I have no real regrets.

But...after leaving Buenos Aires behind, we did not see land again for seven long days. Most of those days were tempest-tossed, and much of the time the decks outside were closed to passengers. So we were a little cooped up, and morale ebbed. We were accompanied by several albatrosses that had distinctive enough markings to give names to, and they followed the ship for days. Seeing Cape Horn (our first land in seven days) was a thrilling sight, and I can identify with sailors of old, joyously shouting "Land Ho!"

I don't feel Celebrity had anticipated the long days at sea, and had little to do for cooped-up passengers forced to stay inside. Sometimes even dopey contests and craft classes are better than thumb-twiddling.

Entertainment: It seems a feature of Celebrity is top quality music entertainment. The ship's band was superb, as was the string quartet, the a capella quartet (our favorite—"SoulD Out"), piano folk, and the Latin guitarist. I really liked that these talented musicians played various times in small venues around the ship, rather than just on the big stage during scheduled productions. The dance-and-song stage production group was highly professional and talented. Their main shows were wonderful (except for "Boogie Nights" which seemed disjointed, too loud and frantic). The comedian was superb, and we were supposed to see him again, but schedule and itinerary changes left him out of the lineup.

What we (I/we is with a non-Cruise-Critic member, my significant other) DIDN'T like about this cruise was the aforementioned forced idleness, lack of seating, lack of outdoor space and seating, terrible embarkation (At Puerto Madryn, maybe two thousand+ people standing outside in a single line as a single-lane gangway tried to embark everyone—took an hour). Hey Celebrity, you guys HAVE been doing this cruise thing a while, haven't you??

The food and food service was outstanding in the main dining room and the Aqua Spa. I really didn't like the Oceanview Café's buffet lines where you had to BE served and couldn't choose your own food and grab-and-go. They did have a variety of various countries' foods, but much of the regular fare was just mediocre.

Our stateroom was just OK. Our balcony had peeling paint and rust, and we only used it occasionally due to the inclement weather, but we loved looking out the ceiling-to-floor window. Shower stall was "large" and water plentiful. Curved bed was a little awkward. Would have liked exterior hair-drier (Princess has these).

Stops: Ushuaia reminds me of Seward, Alaska. Dramatic mountain-and-inlet scenery. Treeline started about a thousand feet up the mountains, and snow started shortly thereafter (even in "summer"). Ushuaia proclaims itself the "End of the World", but curiously, we had to sail 200 miles NORTHWARDS to get there! Shopping is minimal. Local people are friendly (as they were in all stops). Puerto Madryn is scrub desert, treeless and brown, but wild guanacos (and of course the Magellanic penguins) abound. The penguin rookery is astounding—these birds BURROW into hard dirt like foxes, and are completely unafraid of humans—we walked among them casually. Montevideo was nothing special—a shabby city with little to offer. I am a WW II naval buff, so the story and artifacts of the Graf Spee encounter was the draw—the mast-top rangefinder and anchor of the Graf Spee are right by the cruise dock! We booked the shore-excursion-and-airport-drop-off option the last day back in Buenos Aires and LOVED the city tour and visit to the estancia. The food was terrific (and bountiful, with wine, too!) and the gauchos put on a horsemanship exhibition of charging at full gallop to snare a tiny "key ring" with their yerba mate straws. A successful gaucho, to crowd applause, finds a young (or not-so-young) lady to give the ring to, and steal a kiss!

Our economical cruise fare included air (which we won't likely do again--our seats were separated but luckily we got that changed at the last minute), but no time before or after for shopping or wandering. Airport-to-cruiseport shuttle took us on the ugliest, least-scenic route possible.

I can't say this was my favorite cruise. It was, however, highly memorable. I am satisfied that, under the circumstances, I was able to see Antarctica and some of South America, but at great cost in money and time to accomplish.

► Publication Date: 02/25/10

Celebrity Infinity Cruise Review by anita

Antarctica or bust We sailed from Buenos Aires on Sunday 31st January after a chaotic embarkation in the pouring rain with not one porter to be seen and endless queues, this despite having completed our "Express Pass" We were horrified when we handed over our baggage to be put through the security screening and the attendant demanded a tip when all he was doing was picking up our bags and putting them through the machine. We reported this incident once on board and hopefully Celebrity will pass this information on to the authorities in Buenos Aires.

Our first destination was to be the Falkland Islands on Wednesday 3rd February. Late in the afternoon of 2nd we were told that due to bad weather we would not be able to have our planned visit and we would be given more information later.

I had been looking forward to photographing the King Penguins for nearly a year and I just could not hide my disappointment. For several minutes I cried and was inconsolable, however, eventually I appreciated that our safety was paramount and that nothing could be done about it.

Later, we are told that we would now have longer in Antarctica and everyone becomes very excited once again. However, this was not meant to be and with just over 200 miles to go we had an announcement to say we have to turn back as the weather is against us once more. By this time most of us were of the opinion we are going to end up just calling at ports in South America and this is not what we had booked for.

There were many, many passengers who felt so strongly about the decisions being made that a rather large, noisy crowd gathered at Guest Relations. I understand that this got a little out of hand and that further meetings took place and some passengers left the ship at the next port of call. Rumor had it that they were "asked" to leave?

Each day at noon the Captain was supposed to give us an update of our position and weather condition. In fact he missed many of these and without exception ALL the announcements containing bad news were given by the Cruise Director. This did not bode well with passengers who by this time are beginning to question whether or not we would ever have got into the Falklands and should we be trying to attempt Antarctica at all. The excuse given for the Captain not making these announcements was that his English was not good enough; personally, I had no problems understanding him whenever he did choose to speak.

We were now heading for Ushuaia and here we went on the coach to Tierra del Fuego National Park. We were disappointed with this trip as we saw practically no flowers, no birds and indeed very little of anything except a rabbit. Later that day we discovered that the passengers who had taken the catamaran/coach tour saw much, much more.

Having left Ushuaia, we headed once again for Drakes Passage and a second attempt at Antarctica where they hoped we would have just 6 hours – a far cry from the original 2 days and even less than we been told just a few days before.

We had been told our arrival in Paradise Bay would be at 06.30 however, when we got out on deck at 0600 we had clearly been there for some while. I was miffed about this and can't understand, given the circumstances; they didn't pipe an announcement through to the cabins. I am sure a few people would have objected but my guess is the vast majority would have been grateful.

The six hours in Paradise Bay and Gerlache Straight were amazing. The sun shone, the sea was calm, and the sky was blue with beautiful low clouds still hanging in mid air. The whales, penguins, seals and albatross came to greet us. The icebergs were an amazing sight and I feel truly privileged to have spent time here. No wonder the early explorers called this Paradise Bay after having crossed Cape Horn and Drakes Passage.

We then endured a nasty crossing of Drakes Passage for the fourth time and had to alter course in order to try and avoid strong winds (as we then experienced winds of 94mph I dread to think what we might have had on the original course)

The excursion to Punto Tombo and the penguin colony from Puerto Madryn was good but very crowded. The little Magellan penguins were cute but they were not the majestic King Penguins of Antarctica that I so wanted to see.

Montevideo was extremely hot and humid and I was somewhat disappointed at what I saw and would have not been upset if we hadn't gone there.

With so many days at sea it gave passengers plenty of time to talk about the highs and lows of the trip. There were an awful lot of people who like me, began to wonder just how many ships DO get into the Falklands given that the ships anchor 2 miles out and the tender boats cannot be used in waves of more than 3 feet. If what I heard is true and that very few actually get in then I question why it was ever included in the itinerary.

As for getting to the Antarctic Peninsula I just don't know what to think. This was Celebrity's first attempt and I have questioned whether or not the company made the right decisions.

This was our second Celebrity cruise. The first over Christmas and New Year in 2007/8 was a disaster and we had mixed feelings about trying a second one. However, I am pleased to say that nearly all the things that were wrong with the first cruise were right this time round. The food and service were good, we enjoyed the production shows (the headline acts still left much to be desired) and the ship was clean. One complaint I do have is the number of venues that still allow smoking.

Future passengers should be aware that suddenly staff in the Gym are enforcing a rule stating that only enclosed footwear may be worn. Nowhere in the brochure does it warn you of this and there was no notice on the outside of the Gym giving this information. However after we complained a notice was duly put on view before you enter the facility. What annoyed us most of all was that they didn't enforce this rule until we had used the Gym for 5 consecutive days. I should point out that I wasn't wearing fashion shoes but stout sensible Scholl sandals. To make

matters worse a friend told us that she had witnessed people wearing no shoes at all using the Running Machines AFTER we had encountered our problem.

I would really like to know just how many cruise ships actually make it to the Falklands and/or Antarctica. The brochure itinerary certainly doesn't give any indication that there could be problems, thus allowing passengers to make an informed decision before booking. I have had rumors of 5 out of every 8 and even just 50%!

Refund of port fees in the Falklands – many passengers did not receive this and if you are one of them contact Celebrity and ask for.

One last tip – choose an inside cabin low down in the centre because even in 30 foot seas and 94mph winds we were hardly troubled.

► Publication Date: 03/01/10

Celebrity Infinity Cruise Review by Karen 123

Antarctica - put it on your bucket list - trip of a lifetime

SUMMARY: Before my journey to Antarctica, I often skimmed the cruise reviews asking myself “Where does one find the time to write 10 page reviews?” But the more I read, the more valuable was the information I picked up so I promised when I returned, that I would contribute my thoughts and experiences to the web’s vast repository of trip knowledge and hopefully provide some useful tidbits and insights for future Celebrity/Antarctica/South America travelers. It was such a memorable experience that I have actually enjoyed writing about it to relive the voyage. Seeing Antarctica was on my mother’s “bucket list” and I accompanied her to help fulfill her dream.

AIR ARRANGEMENTS VIA CELEBRITY: I vacillated over booking our own flights vs. letting Celebrity choose them, but was partial to the idea of Celebrity taking some culpability in the event the flight was delayed/cancelled. The arrangements could not have worked out better. The outbound flight on American Airlines was timed perfectly with little wasted time switching planes. We were seated near the rear and soon realized we were among fellow passengers who had flown into Miami from various places to converge for the overnight flight to Buenos Aires. We had the good fortune of no delays following some major snowstorms hitting the East. The return flight post cruise was unfortunately not until 11:30 p.m. This was not any fault of Celebrity. No international flights back to the U.S. left before mid/late evening from Buenos Aires. It was a long day at the airport, but considering the throngs of distraught and stranded passengers at the airport rerouted or trying to return to Santiago after the earthquake, we felt fortunate to be returning to our intact homes and families, regardless of the late hour.

HANDICAPPED COMMENTS: I want to mention my mother’s physical condition hoping that her positive experience will encourage others her age and condition to consider this trip. As a result of several falls over the years and a recent auto accident, she was in constant pain. Standing for any length of time was agony. Our travel agent, Carl Bruno of CruisePlanners, suggested ‘wheelchair assist’ at the airports. It was a godsend. A representative from the airline greeted her with a wheelchair whenever we exited a plane. She was then escorted through baggage control, passport and customs, and security. She barely needed to stand or walk. She would NEVER have been able to maneuver the airport without this service. American Airlines was incredible. Carl also ordered “peer assistance” at the port. In addition, at several ports, including Montevideo and Ushuaia, we borrowed a wheelchair from Celebrity and I was able to push her through the streets. I also borrowed a wheelchair to walk her around the deck. At the buffets on board the ship, as soon as she walked in with her cane, a member of the Celebrity staff promptly offered to hold her tray as well as help her navigate the food lines. The only real challenge was the mandatory lifeboat drill. We were lined up in tight rows of about 8 people each and needed to stand for quite awhile listening to the instructions in various languages. In

addition, I don't know if any accommodations are available for the hearing impaired – we did not inquire, but – she did not hear any announcements unless I repeated them to her.

EMBARKATION: It seems to make logical sense to talk about embarkation first although I hate to begin on a negative note as the trip was truly spectacular in every other way. So I'll get the negativism out of the way. We exited the aircraft, gathered our luggage and proceeded through customs. A very nice Celebrity representative greeted us and distributed color coded stick-on dots that corresponded to a transport bus. Our luggage was tagged with our cabin numbers and we were directed to wait to the side. There was way fewer seats than people but standing felt good after the long flight. (at least to me, not my mother) Close to an hour passed and we were then herded to another terminal on foot. It was a pretty long walk with our carry ons and the guide never looked back to ensure the stragglers with canes were keeping up or knew where to go. Whoever got to the terminal first was directed to stand by a particular statue and await further instructions. Again a handful of seats for 100's of passengers. The folks bringing up the rear got the instructions from other passengers as the person in charge disappeared for another hour. She returned and called 1 color and directed the others to remain and if there was room on the bus, some of us might be able to join them. We were called, along with several others, although the bus ended up not having enough room after all and several had to turn back to the airport terminal. The bus had an odd circular staircase leading to the seats, difficult for able bodied to maneuver and very challenging for those needing assistance. The bus sat for quite some time with the guide seeming a bit flustered but my limited command of Spanish did not permit me to understand the conversation she was having with the driver. After the hour drive to the pier, we exited the bus where swarms of travel weary people wandering around aimlessly until we were motioned to a building. We lined up or I should say amassed by a line of computer terminals. There were a few barriers that might lend itself to some order but no one seemed to take charge and direct us. We eventually got our turn to register and received our stateroom cards. We were led to another line for the embarkation picture, which didn't come out half bad considering what we looked like after the lengthy flight. Then on to a seatless bus. I guess there was no need for seats in them because they were so crammed with people, we held each other up by the force. Luckily, this was about a 2 minute bus ride and apparently required by the local authorities. An announcement was made that the staterooms were not ready and that we could go directly to floor 10 for a lunch buffet. The lines for the elevator were staggering but by now, we were pros at line waiting. So we lugged our carry-ons and eventually arrived on floor 10.

Our bags were not delivered until bedtime so we dined in our travel clothes looking quite grungy – perhaps that is why there were 3 empty seats at our table. We redefined “smart casual,” but that is where some minor inconveniences transformed into 14 days of paradise.

DEMOGRAPHICS: The captain and many of the officers were from Greece. The remaining Celebrity crew was multinational, as were the passengers. If I had to pick a dominant language that I heard in the elevators and halls, it was German, possibly followed by Spanish. The guests for the most part all exuded warmth and friendliness, despite our obvious language barriers.

There was a universal awe when standing beside the icebergs in Antarctica that spoke to all of us, regardless of our country of origin.

ANTARCTICA: The icebergs were of indescribable beauty. Standing on deck 11, they stood about the same height as we, and supposedly they are only 1/10 above water. It is mind boggling to think how deep they penetrate the ocean. One is more breathtaking than the next. Seals and penguins frequented the incredible ice floes. In addition, families of whales darted in and out regularly – humpbacks and even an orca family. It is like a water safari. Whales spewing water like the spray of a shaken soda bottle, slender sleek bodies plunging beneath the deep ocean waters to disappear - only magically to reappear a few feet away. Penguins waddling to the edge of an ice floe and jumping like parachuters off a plane or schoolchildren in line to soar into a lake. The breakfast buffet was packed full by 7 and the excitement was palpable as we approached Elephant Island at 8 that morning. The temperature was bitter cold (minus 5 Fahrenheit), but you felt an invisible pull keeping you outside so you won't miss a second of the panoramic beauty. I went back and forth between the Constellation lounge and the otherworldly paradise outside. The lounge has floor to ceiling windows which offer a spectacular 360 degree view without the icy snow and wind at your face. The hand warmers I brought were the smartest thing I packed! Onlookers were wrapped snugly in Celebrity provided blue-green plaid wool blankets. The sea at Elephant Island was so still, appearing as a leathery blend of grey and black, gently rippling endlessly as far as the eye could see. The icebergs are so very humbling. Thoughts of Ernest Shackleton's 1914 expedition can't help but race through your mind. 421 days of unforgiving temperatures and conditions on a vessel a fraction of the size of the Infinity. Meanwhile the water dances around in hues of aquamarine, blues and hazy whites, the sky grey and blanketing, threatening yet comforting. Periodic dips into the hot tub provided welcome warmth to face the wind pummeling across my face.

INTERNET access: I frequented the internet café. I generally stay disconnected from email during a vacation but it was my link to the rest of my family. I purchased the \$99 package which included 287 minutes of connect time. About \$20 remained at the end of the 2 weeks so it really was plenty. I indulged solely for emailing to/from the family and did not even skim the other varied and sorted messages one receives in the course of a day so I was a light user. I learned from a fellow passenger who works in broadcasting that satellites orbit the earth around the equator so when you are this far South, it is very difficult to get a signal. The internet was intermittently available, especially down in/around Antarctica but signs were clearly posted "due to weather conditions, ship maneuvering and/or ship position, internet is down" and it usually was available again by the time I passed the café again. I brought a laptop with a wireless card. The ship had ample wifi areas so there was never a wait for a terminal in the café, although, I never saw it completely filled anyway. Celebrity generously provided printing gratis for those with internet packages but I had no need for this service.

MISCELLANEOUS: DRESS CODE: There were 3 formal nights of which I'd say about 75% of the passengers participated. Corkage: I am not a drinker but Carl Bruno, our travel agent

graciously sent a bottle of wine and I decided to indulge. Beware the \$25 corkage fee. (or ask your room attendant for a cork screw)

WEATHER/PACKING: The temperature ranged from -5 degrees in Antarctica to 90's in Buenos Aires. The majority of the trip, however, was cold. Many shorts and short sleeved shirts came home unworn. The Falklands and Ushuaia were both heavy jacket days. The sea days were mostly very cold and windy. Celebrity provided very nice warm wool blankets for on deck though. Hot chocolate was plentiful as well.

ON-BOARD ACTIVITIES: A 14 day cruise got long. After I had won a Celebrity luggage tag and pen in 'Name that tune,' and attended several trivia sessions, it got old.

CHILDREN: There were a smattering of children on board, but probably due to the length of the voyage and the fact it was not during a school break, passengers under the age of 20 were far and few between.

PHOTO GALLERY: I really enjoyed the fact that the photographers were not constantly 'in your face.' They were not pushy or overbearing, and even had quite a sense of humor. The video of the 2 weeks (available for purchase) was amazing and a wonderful montage of culture, wildlife, and the trip's splendor.

THE NEWS: "Celebrity Today" provided a great daily synopsis of the next day's activities (placed on your bed at turndown so you could plan the next day's agenda). World news summaries were also on hand each evening by the concierge, in 6 or 7 languages. We were never far from staying abreast of the Toyota scandal which seemed to frequent the headlines those 2 weeks.

VALENTINE'S DAY: We embarked on Valentine's Day and the buffet displayed several tacky party store-like holiday signs and cupids suspended from the ceiling along with a large chocolate heart sitting amongst the desserts. A classy touch, however, was a rose delivered to every lady during dinner.

GYM/EXERCISE: I frequented the ½ hour "Fab Abs" workout each morning led by Robson. I also availed myself of the numerous treadmills. The weight equipment seemed well maintained and plentiful. I particularly appreciated the almost infinite size adjustments on the machines.

OUR CAPTAIN: Captain Michail Margaritis provided just the right amount of information across the PA system. He wouldn't win Mr. Congeniality, but I'd rather he be in charge of the safety of the ship rather than the entertainment.

GERMS: This next comment is coming from someone who is a little bit over the top with hand washing. There was a constant noticeable coughing/sneezing background symphony taking place in the audience at most shows. While there were ample hand sanitizers located in the entrances to all restaurants and public rooms, the Celebrity staff was not at all proactive at encouraging or

enforcing their use. I had taken several NCL voyages where staff was actually holding the spray bottles and proactively spritzing some sanitizer into your hands at every turn. While some may perceive this as invasive, I must say, rarely a cough or sneeze was heard on the Norwegian.

SHOPPING: We were disappointed with the lack of Antarctica souvenirs available on the ship. We heard conflicting stories from staff - 1 salesperson said they'd be available the last day (after everyone bought all the other port t-shirts). Another later said that they all sold out on the last sailing and no additional were ordered. They did sell penguins made of sea glass, a penguin pooper candy dispenser, various books etc. In Celebrity's defense though, with the Antarctica population of zero and no gift shops, an Antarctica souvenir would not have been very authentic and likely made in China anyway!

DINING: I did not try the specialty restaurant "SS United States" but heard it was a wonderful experience with diners outnumbered by staff about 10 to 1. I frequented the Trellis restaurant and didn't feel any burning desire to eat elsewhere. We sat at table 519, the upper floor of the 2 story restaurant, near a window where we witnessed magnificent sunsets. We selected the early sitting (6:15). We never felt rushed getting back to the boat after excursions and the time worked out perfectly. The meal was leisurely but finished in plenty of time to attend a 9 p.m. show. The left side of the menu remained constant with selections available daily, all of which were tantalizing and delicious. The right side changed daily with a plentiful selection for vegetarian, meat eaters alike. I especially enjoyed their daily seafood choices – each cooked to perfection, perfectly seasoned. I pride myself on my homemade soups, but I have to say Celebrity's soups were par excellent, you could taste the fresh ingredients. I did not indulge in desserts although tempting, until the last night, the 'Paris meets New York,' New York style cheesecake served in a French pastry. After sampling this concoction, I had a momentary regret of not sampling the earlier confections, but the fact that my clothes still fit validated my decision to abstain. Our waiter, Ahron and assistant, Yudell were delightful and within a day, knew all of our preferences without asking like water without ice, decaf coffee, etc. They served with such warmth and always seemed genuinely happy to be there.

LUNCH: We usually ate lunch at the Oceanview Café, with something for everyone, from salads to pastas, pizza to sandwiches. I particularly enjoyed the Panini station as well as the daily international specials. Breezes Pool Grill was also open for lunch and offered burgers, hotdogs, fries etc. I also learned they'd grill chicken upon request. The AquaSpa Café was yet another lunch alternative with a lighter fare. We sampled the fresh poached exotic fruits, daily seafood entrees, and homemade bread sticks that were to die for!

ENTERTAINMENT: Cruise Director Allan King – I've experienced more active, dynamic cruise directors, but he fulfilled his purpose and was entertaining in a dry sort of way. Evening shows: entertainment ran the gamut from spectacular to mediocre but I didn't expect Broadway each and every night of a 14 day cruise so I was not disappointed. Performers included the absolutely topnotch Celebrity dancers/singers (who WERE Broadway quality), a group of highly

talented acapella singers, Brandi Chapman – a vocalist, Mark Donoghue - skilled with a variety of instruments including Mandolin, guitar, harmonica and violin. Also, your token juggler. I especially enjoyed the pianist in one of the lounges – very talented and warm personality, Tom Listebarger. One performer of mention, Brooks Aehron – although a very talented pianist, made a very distasteful reference to the decorative torches flanking the sides of the theater making him feel like he is performing at the crematorium. What a desecration of the memories of those that lost their lives in them. Many shocked concert goers exited the theater while others refused to attend his repeat performances further along the trip.

CINEMA: Movies were plentiful with several showings per day. I did not take full advantage of the films thinking I could always rent when I am home rather than waste the time on the South Atlantic in front of a movie. Selections included “Bride Wars,” “Knowing,” “Soloist,” “Easy Virtue,” “Wolverine,” “Duplicity,” “Star Trek,” “Marley and Me,” “Valkyrie,” “Last Chance Harvey,” and “Watchmen.” Other very appropriate movies considering our ports of Antarctica, Argentina etc. included “Eight Below,” “Endurance Expedition,” “March of the Penguins,” “Evita,” and “Encounters at the End of the World.” Pay per view movies were also available on the televisions in the staterooms.

SPECIAL INTEREST SPEAKERS: These were both wonderful and included a retired professor Richard Ojakangas, a geologist with 38 years of research on all continents who spoke on Ernest Shackleton, penguins, glaciation, and global warming/oil. The second, Graham Sunderland, a naturalist – spoke on Antarctica, the wildlife of the South Atlantic, and whales. The subject matter for the most part was very stimulating, and the few lectures that were less than interesting to me, provided me with a wonderful mid morning nap!

PORTS: USUAIA: I can't comment on the other excursions in Ushuaia, but a Beagle Channel catamaran to Sea Wolves Island can definitely easily be found for ½ the price of the cruise sponsored trip. Once you exit the ship and walk past the security checkpoint, there are about 15 kiosks offering various boating options as well as taxi drivers and guides. Most only had 1 daily departure, however, mid morning – so if you plan to take advantage of any of these sailings, get an early start on breakfast and debarking. We chose Patagonia Adventure Explorer mainly because of the sales pitch of going on a smaller boat than a catamaran and being able to come much closer to Sea Wolves etc. We later saw that the catamarans went just as close but we enjoyed Patagonia Explorers none the less. We were roughly a group of 15, accompanied by a bilingual guide who showed us our journey on maps as well as shared with us books and information about the history of the area. The trip was 4 hours and included Sea Wolves Island, home to a colony of sea lions, Bird's Island, full with cormorant inhabitants, and the Les Eclaireurs lighthouse built in 1919. On the way back, we stopped on Bridges Island for a ½ hour walk to a scenic lookout with beautiful picture taking opportunities of the waters and surrounding snow capped mountains. We also enjoyed a very interesting talk on the aboriginal inhabitants of the area. Onboard the boat, we were served plentiful amounts of coffee, tea, hot chocolate, assorted cookies and some type of liqueur that we did not try. Ushuaia proved to be

the best place for Antarctica souvenirs (made in China), but say Antarctica nonetheless. It is an extremely steep uphill climb to reach the shopping area – not wheelchair accessible.

PORT STANLEY, Falkland Islands: The ship excursion “A day at the Beach with Royalty” was sold out long before we sailed, so I booked the same excursion with Patrick Watts who many people on the web have commented on and is ½ the price. A placard with my name was on display as we tendered and the 4x4’s were waiting to whisk us away to Volunteer Point. We arrived in the Falklands, population less than 2,500, an hour later than scheduled due to wave/weather conditions so we had a very short stop at Volunteer Point. We literally had to run from 1 penguin area to another to be able to view/photograph them all. It was not Patrick’s fault – just not enough hours in port there. We did see King, Gentoo and Magellanic penguins, adults, babies and even eggs. We had also arrived on about the only non rainy day in weeks so the drive was extremely muddy and we had to make frequent stops to pull other 4x4’s in the caravan out of the peat bogs. The ride was extremely bumpy and riders should heed the warning “not recommended for guests with back, neck or mobility problems.” I would also definitely recommend Patrick’s operation. He delivered as advertised. One tip I read about which proved worthwhile is to pack a pair of disposable painter’s shoe covers. The grounds are coated in penguin poop! My sneakers were like new after the trek with the covers. Penguins were plentiful as far as the eye could see. There were no boundaries and you could walk beside them. The ride is long – about 3 hours each way – with mostly monotone vistas of peat, rocks and occasional sheep. Our driver, Steven Vincent, in addition to expertise with a 4x4 in waist deep mud, provided entertaining stories and good music that made the 3 hours pass rather quickly.

MONTEVIDEO, Uruguay – I took a city tour through Celebrity which was very enjoyable and included the highlights, important monuments and sites. The guide was very well versed in the history etc. Upon returning, I borrowed a wheelchair and took mom on a stroll down to the market. Buenos Aires – If you have extra time in Buenos Aires, I highly recommend getting in touch with a woman that I stumbled upon on the web – Sandra Gutrejde from My Buenos Aires Travel Guide or www.batravelguide.com. Sandra is a refreshing, delightful woman who proved to be responsive, accommodating, friendly and so helpful. I really cannot say enough positive. I approached Sandra with some ideas of my own but after explaining my mother’s physical condition, she recommended against my ideas despite potentially missing out on our patronage. She was so selfless and delivered on all promises and exceeded my expectations, going above and beyond in her kindness and knowledge.

PUERTO MADRYN, Argentina – we took the courtesy shuttle to downtown, walked around a bit, and then called it a day, choosing to relax by the pool on our first warm day in 2 weeks.

Publication Date: 06/27/10