

A Cruise on Lake Michigan

By Jan Ross · in Cruising ·



JAN ROSS

As a child Jan traveled the world as her dad was a career officer in the Marine Corps. She has been writing all her life so it was a natural progression to become a full time travel writer. Lucky for her that her husband is a travel photographer so the two are together often on assignments, photographing and documenting their adventures.

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AIA CRUISE AROUND MANHATTAN

The captain had some bad news. The Grande Mariner, our cruise ship, was not going anywhere today. Docked at colorful Navy Pier in Chicago, and ready to head out on an adventure on Lake Michigan, it was stationary for the day and would remain so. The lake was apparently experiencing weather far out beyond the shores of Chicago which was keeping us moored a little longer.



Grande Mariner

In all our years of cruising we'd never experienced a cruise that was grounded because of weather but Blount Small Ship Adventures was determined to still make this experience memorable. They immediately made plans for a cruise of the harbor on a large sailing ship in the morning and offered an architecture cruise of the city on the Chicago River in the afternoon, at no cost to the passengers.



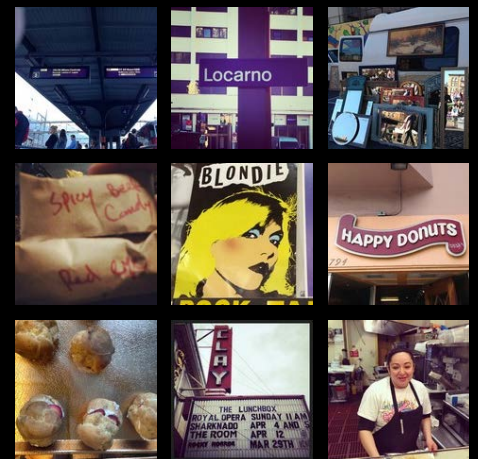
Grande Mariner Cabin

It was really pleasant to return to the Grande Mariner though, after a day of

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adventures in Chicago. It was our home away from home and quite comfortable. The ship holds only 98 passengers and although the cabins are comparatively small, they're well designed and have plenty of room for two large bags. Our cases slid easily under the bed, a plus when you're in a cabin for a week and don't relish tripping over them the entire time.



Grande Mariner Dining Room

The ship has a large bar and lounge area with comfortable seating. An unusual and pleasant benefit of cruising with Blount is that they encourage passengers to bring their own wine and spirits onboard, even offering to store it for them and providing mixers and snacks. Passengers can also get a soft drink from the fountain behind the bar at any time and also in the large dining area downstairs.



Grande Mariner Sundeck

A large sun deck tops the ship, furnished with plenty of chairs and lounges to enjoy the scenery. Once we left Chicago, it was extremely pleasant to relax there with the sun beating down on our faces while marveling at how large Lake Michigan is. The lake covers hundreds of miles which surprised us and when you're in the middle of it there's no land in sight.



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Milwaukee Art Museum

On the next day when the weather hadn't improved, Blount arranged for a bus to transport us to nearby Milwaukee, a stop on the itinerary and a beautiful city that doesn't disappoint, sprawled along Lake Michigan's shores with lots of trees, vast expanses of green, and a reputation for hosting a plethora of festivals. The Milwaukee Art Museum was especially impressive with over 30,000 works of art but what was truly interesting was the architecture. The Quadracci Pavilion, the most recognizable of the three buildings making up the museum, was designed by the award winning Spanish architect, Santiago Calatrava. The gull-like white wings which flare out above the building comprise a 217-foot wingspan, a moveable sunscreen, which unfolds twice daily in a remarkable display of creative engineering.



Even though we only had one day in Milwaukee, we managed to fit in a quick tour of the city, a foodie tour, and a brewery tour. Milwaukee Food and City Tours offers a variety of foodie tours in town, including one that includes the local restaurants on Brady Street, a historic area where Italian and Polish immigrants settled. Theresa Nemetz, the company's founder, offered us a mini-tour to save some time which included sampling some delicious local specialties and an insider perspective on this interesting neighborhood where she and her husband grew up.



Food Tour

Touring a local brewery is usually a favorite of the guys and my husband is no exception. We found the tour of Lakefront Brewery the perfect way to end our day in Milwaukee. For only \$7, you get a tour of the brewery, a souvenir glass and four 6 ounce pours of whatever brews you choose. Afterward you can hang out with other brew lovers in the visitors' area with a large bar.



Lakefront Brewery

The weather did finally clear and we cruised away from our berth at Chicago's Navy Pier on a gorgeous, sunny day. The sapphire blue waters of Lake Michigan spread to the horizon as we headed to quiet Beaver Island, quaint Holland, Michigan, and other ports. The most interesting stop for us was lovely Mackinac Island.



Mackinac Island Downtown

Made famous in the romantic film “Somewhere in Time” and perched on top of Mackinac Island like a grand dame, the Grand Hotel is truly a joy to visit. Beautifully furnished with exquisite period furniture and old fashioned rocking chairs on the front porch, we couldn’t resist stopping to enjoy a panoramic view of the island. Here we enjoyed a buffet lunch with so many choices of fresh, local foods, then toured the property which included watching tidbits of the movie partially filmed there.



Mackinac Island Carriages

Cars are not allowed on the island, so a carriage tour of the island was a requirement. We finished our day on Mackinac with a bike ride on the seven mile bike trail that runs completely around the island and provides scenic views of the lake.



Our Blount Small Ship Adventures cruise proved to be an eye-opener in many ways. This small ship line offered a perfectly relaxing and alternative way to see big cities, small ports, and a few of the many islands in Lake Michigan.

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