

# **Azamara Club Cruises – Athens to Rome**

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In May 2011 I took a cruise with Azamara Club Cruises aboard the Azamara Journey: We cruised the Greek Isles, Malta, Sicily and Italy Coastline ending in Rome. Azamara Club Cruises has 2 ships, each holding a maximum 694 passengers and 408 crew. They specialize in staying longer at the ports, I would categorize them as upscale but with a relaxed, casual (country club) environment.

The small ship is the way to go, over 70% of their Cabins have verandahs. The cabins are a good size with sufficient room for bed and a small sofa, which I think makes all the difference in comfort in the cabin. Closet space was fine for 2 passengers. Bottled water and soft drinks are included in the cruise price as well as wine for lunch and dinner, they also offer higher quality wines at cost. The cabin stewards are very friendly and personable, as are the dining room waiters. The ship does have free self service laundry as well as laundry service for a fee. Gratuities are included in cruise cost (except for tour guides).

Azamara has open seating in their main dining and two speciality dining rooms, which can be reserved, with a cover charge for the specialty dining rooms. The meals are good size, not too big. In the main dining room, in addition to their nightly menu, they also offer some standards that do not change day to day.

As Azamara emphasizes longer stops at the ports, sailing much later in the evening, and we had 2 days in Sorrento. Azamara's shore excursions are planned to give you free time at the end of the tour, and because of the ships longer stays, and the fact that the ships are either docked close by or offer nonstop tender service, travelers can spend as much or as little time as they want after the excursion is over. For example, we were able to stay in Pompeii longer since I knew how to take the train back to Sorrento where the ship was located. Also, at each port they have a local tourist board representative on board for some or all of the time in port who provide travelers with maps, and sightseeing information for those that want to tour independently.

We took a wonderful shore excursion in Sorrento -called "Hike the Path of the Gods". It's a 2.5 hour walk along the Amalfi coast, starting at Bomerano (a small village ) walking through the hills above the town ending up in another small village above Positano. It is not a strenuous walk, but you do need to be able to walk the distance. After the hike we were taken to Positano for lunch with time to do some shopping before heading back to the ship.