

# South Florida/Bahamas/Norwegian Cruise Line

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I was fortunate enough to leave the grey skies of Portland behind and escape to the sunshine of South Florida and the Bahamas for a few days. Flying into Fort Lauderdale from Portland was pretty painless with an overnight flight on Continental via Houston. Luckily my brother lives there so I didn't have to bother with transfers and hotels, but there are plenty of beautiful properties to choose from all along the beach. Fort Lauderdale is great with its clean beaches, sidewalk cafes and mild surf. Miami is vibrant and alive with a wide variety of cultures being represented all in one city.

I spent most of my time in North Miami Beach, away from the hustle of the city. It made for a convenient location, about 20 minutes from both Fort Lauderdale and South Beach. The day I spent in South Beach was by far my favorite. All of the art deco architecture is a throw back to the Florida of the past and the people watching can't be beat. It is a bit touristy, so avoid the traps, but we did get to see John Walsh film an episode of America's Most Wanted, so you never know who you are going to see!

As a first time cruiser, I decided to go on a short 3 day Norwegian Cruise to the Bahamas leaving from the Port of Miami. The Norwegian Sky was nicely kept and very large, almost like a floating city. The staff was extremely friendly and helpful. The people on board were certainly ready to have a good time and the staff was right there to get the festivities started. Since many people were utilizing this cruise as a short escape from the real world, the cruise was much more based on having a good time on board, rather than the itinerary. There were a variety of parties each night along with Bingo, Gambling and of course, eating.

We docked in the early morning of the second day in Nassau. After making our way through the droves of tourist traps selling key chains and knock off handbags, we started to explore the city. Shortly after starting our exploration, we decided it might be a better use of our time to take a guided tour of the island. We arranged a 2 hour tour in a private caravan for \$25 each. Our guide was very friendly and pointed out many things that we would have never found on our own. NCL offers a wide variety of shore excursions in the Bahamas, from swimming with the Dolphins at Atlantis to taking a glass bottom boat tour along the coastline. In town I was amazed at the amount of high end and diamond shops. Since you can get items for about 20% less than in the states, people were stocking up on Chanel purses like they were at Target! We headed back to the boat and ate at their Italian Restaurant which we had made reservations at the day before. On the Sky they have three specialty restaurants (Italian, French and a Steak House) that you pay a surcharge to eat at. We found that it was worth it and enjoyed an excellent meal.

The following day we were scheduled to spend the day at Norwegian's private island, Great Stirrup Cay, snorkeling and hanging out. Since there are certain things that are out of everyone's control, we received an announcement that we would not be able to dock since the waters were too rough. The staff added additional seminars and activities to the schedule since we would be on the ship the whole time. The sun was still shining, so I don't think people were too upset. Lunch was a madhouse. They had a BBQ on the deck near the pool (where most people were) and it was quite chaotic, but that was the only time that I felt like the staff didn't have the situation under control.

Disembarking was painless the next morning and that ended my first cruising experience! I would recommend this type of cruise if you just want to let your hair down, meet new people and not think about a thing! If you are more focused on cultural activities and ports, I would take a longer cruise which is more land focused. You can really make the most of your time by adding on a few days in Miami pre or post cruise. You can always go and visit Mickey Mouse also, since Orlando is only a few hours drive away!