

I had the privilege of sailing **Margaritaville at Sea's Islander** recently, and I have to say, it exceeded my expectations! I was able to take advantage of the Heroes Sail Free promotion, and as a travel agent, was able to obtain a behind the scenes tour with Business Development Manager, Nadia.

This is my honest opinion and review of our 7-day cruise on Islander.

Arrival to port was quick and easy. It was well labeled with friendly teams to help direct you where to go and the lines moved very quickly. I do like that they give you your sailing card at check-in not left in your door, but they cannot punch it for you to place on a lanyard at check-in. Look for the lanyard station or go to the gift shop once it opens; they can punch it for you there. Once on board, the magic truly began as the Islander team was there to greet you, upbeat and energized. I do appreciate their organization to direct everyone immediately to muster to remove delays in sailing from those that try to skip it. Super easy process: show up to your station, get signed off and watch the muster drill instructions on your TV in your room.

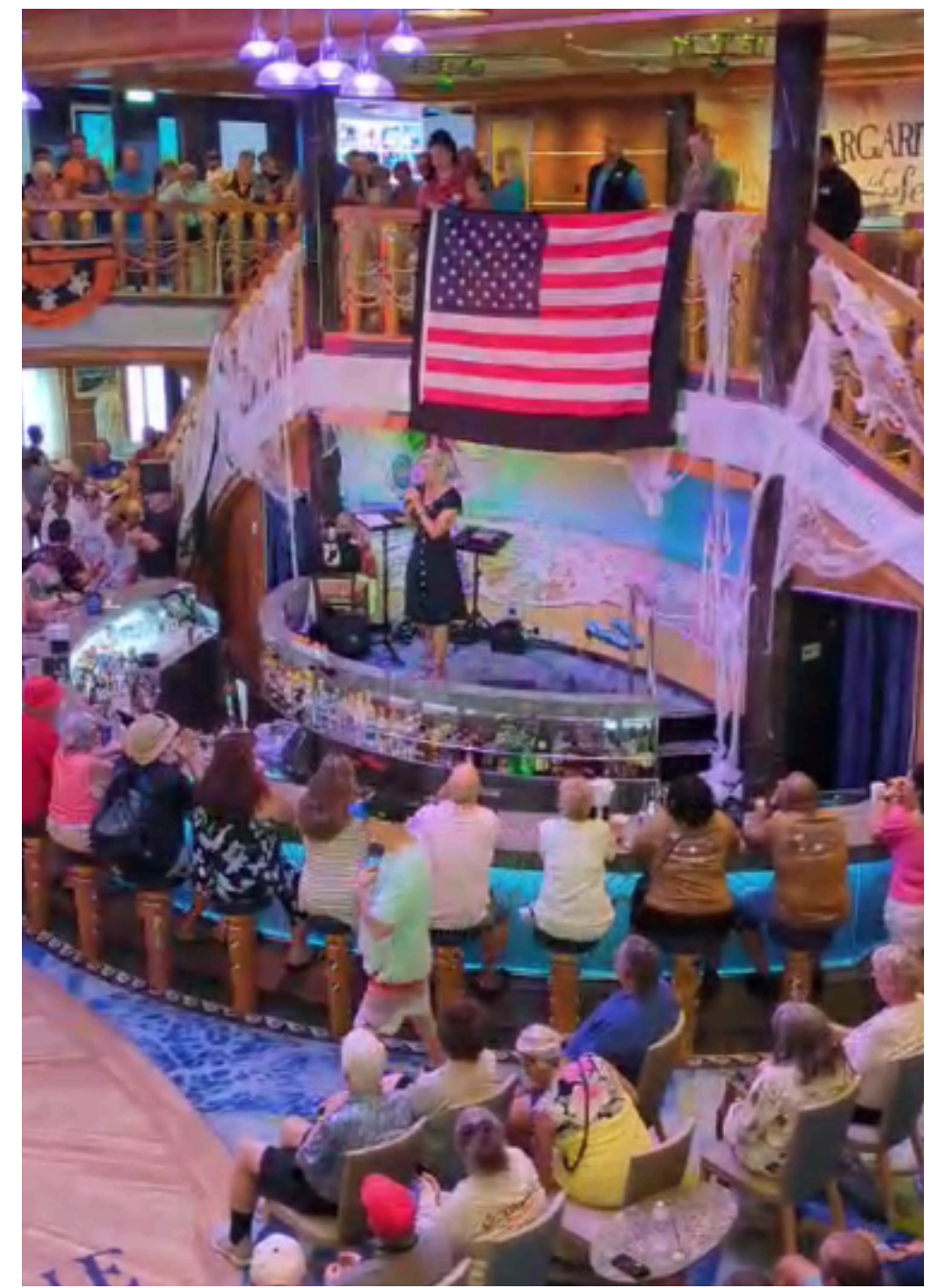


The ship is clean, well lit and easy to navigate. I would say there were only 3, maybe 4 employees during the entire trip that were not happy, smiling and ready to help, which is great considering there was a large group sailing as well as being a full sailing with Halloween and the coveted stop in Belize. The hospitality on this cruise is what really stood out for me. Through ALL my cruises, Margaritaville at Sea Islander had the strongest hospitality on the seas.

We upgraded our fare free cruise to a breeze balcony stateroom. It is a standard balcony stateroom and was perfect for the two of us sailing. With our package, we had priority luggage delivery and some of our bags were on the floor when we were able to get into our rooms at 1:30pm. Our room steward Pandy was amazing. There was no need that was not met. Our room was a little warmer than we would have liked, but the hotel director was very present and supportive of not only the guests, but his team, and after 3 requests, ended up freezing us out the last few days of our cruise. We were okay with that and appreciated them working to meet our request.



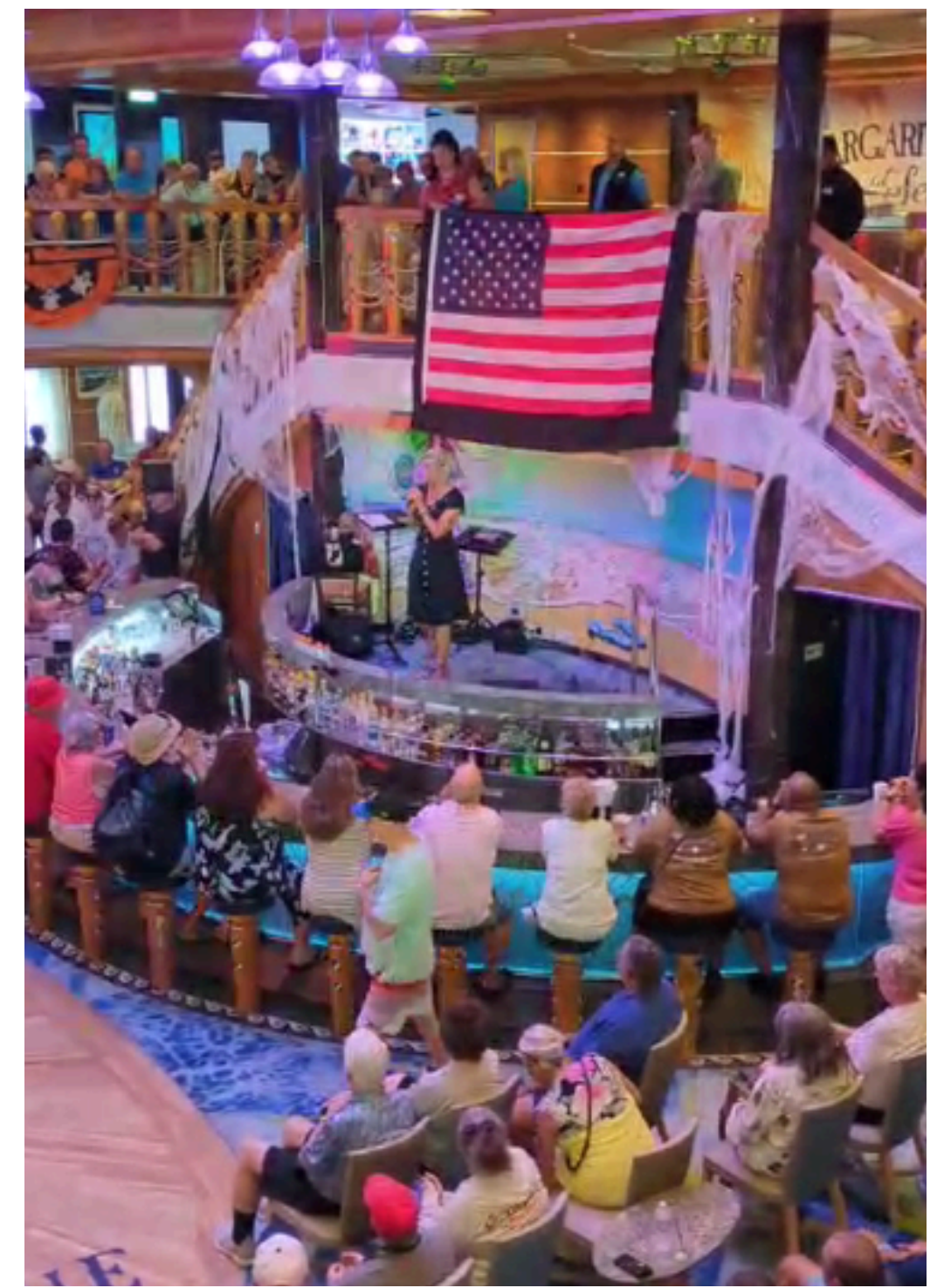
Heroes Tribute was mind-blowing amazing! Our cruise director **Zee Jay** and the entire Islander crew outdid themselves. I recorded the entire presentation, but social media will not allow me to share it as it is too long, even broken into segments! (we didn't have enough followers for me to go live on Facebook! 😞) Hearing personal stories from some of our veterans sailing, and honoring each branch of the military, first responders, medical personnel and educators, there were goose bumps and tears flowing all around us. It was a very special appreciation and Margaritaville at Sea should be proud of their tribute and the offers they give to all Heroes with their Heroes Sail Free offer.



I mentioned our package earlier; we purchased the **Ultimate Islander Escape** that included Wi-Fi, Drinks, Dining Package, Spa Credits, Shore Excursion Credits, Reserved Show Seating and more. I like to call it the "all inclusive" package as there wasn't much of anything that we were lacking, and we used every bit of the dining package! (Al la cart, it was over \$500 in savings!) I cannot recommend enough Far Side Sushi and JWB Steakhouse. Some of the best food available on the seas. Sparkling Bruch on sea days hands down one of the best brunches. The buffet was good; there were not as many options available as on other cruise lines, but the main dining room menus were smaller too. As with the rest of the ship, the buffet was clean and well stocked. Cheeseburger in Paradise and the Taco Cantina were very comparable to other cruise lines. Breakfast burritos were spot on!



Here is my biggest complaint: the Main Dining Room Menu. First, there are two MDRs: the Islander Dining Room which is on deck 3 and Fins Dining Room on deck 2. They serve the same menu, but Islander serves dinner on table clothed tables while Fins does not. So, if you want the upscale dining you go to Islander; if you want super casual dining, you go to Fins. Please note: if you want to dine in the Islander dining room, you want to get there about 5:15pm, otherwise you will be sent downstairs for dinner.



The menus are small and change every day. They are based on dishes and flavors of your ports of call. Honestly, it was not the highlight of the trip. The offerings were either lacking flavor, unusual pairings or drenched in this white sauce. They always offered us something else, but we ate at the buffet more than I usually do. The Caesar salads in the MDR were consistently good! Always got one of those! You can order 2 appetizers, 1 entrée and 2 desserts with no additional fees. If you are sailing in a suite, or have purchased the dining package, you also have a suite exclusive menu available. (with the dining package you only get to order from it ONCE, not the entire sailing as was advertised to us!)

You will not go hungry but if you are someone who really wants to enjoy eating in the MDR on your cruise, you may be disappointed.



The pools! You have three pools on the ship: 2 on the main pool deck and one in the adults only area. We thought we would spend all our time in the adults only area, but as I mentioned before, we had a large private sailing group and that pool is much smaller. However, we were able to spend a great amount of time in the main pools and for Michelle, this was her first cruise she was able to get into a cruise deck pool! There are private cabanas available for rent, but, at \$250.00 per day, it was a little too steep for us who wanted to get in, enjoy the water, not just sit poolside.

We did not make it to any of the shows. With our package we did have reserved seating, but we never made it there. We did hear they were great and we did see some of the cast performing around the ship.



Shopping was also limited compared to other cruise lines, but that did not hinder us from spending some money in the signature shops. They had a day that was 20% off signature clothing for heroes. They do ask for verification so if able, have a copy of your badge or credentials for easy verification. Inch of Gold was available, liquor tastings, and other cruise related deals were available.

Tattoos are also available on Islander, and this has become a huge hit with Margaritaville at Sea guests. So much so, they now have their own space with two tattoo rooms. I scheduled my consultation, then chickened out, so, no direct feedback there. Everyone who received a tattoo was very happy and they apply second skin to protect the tattoo while healing allowing you to continue to enjoy your shore excursions and beach days. Maybe on a future sailing for me!



The spa; always one of our happy places. It was good. My largest complaint was that as we had spa credits with our packages, we could not take advantage of the pre-booking discounts and had to pay full price. They offered different services discounts throughout the sailing and honestly wished I hadn't booked ahead of time to take advantage of one of them. They didn't have enough room to reschedule me for the upgraded services, but that's not their fault. The music was broken in my room, so, I had deck music playing versus soothing spa music, but the facial itself was good, and my travel bestie's massage was good. All in all, no real complaints that would prevent me from scheduling another service.

Overall, our trip on Islander was great. I would give the cruise a firm rating of 8.5/10. It'd be higher if the MDR food quality were better, but that will not stop me from promoting Margaritaville at Sea, their Heroes Sail Free and I am strongly looking forward to Beachcomber coming in 2026!



**Thank you, Margaritaville
at Sea and the entire
Islander crew!
It was a great week!**

