

*Michele's photographs and short stories relive her journeys that will make you feel as though you are right there with her. She translates her personal victory when she climbs an active volcano in Italy, rides a 4x4 in Spain, and visits France's breathtaking coastline. And then there's the unexpected visitor.*

## **OUR UNFORGETTABLE CRUISE**

by Michele Rose-Sprunk

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Michele Rose-Sprunk

A sunset over the ocean with a red parrot in flight. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a golden glow across the sky and reflecting on the water. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a bright orange and yellow near the sun. The ocean has white-capped waves breaking onto a sandy beach in the foreground. A red parrot is captured in mid-flight on the right side of the image, its wings spread wide. The text is overlaid on the scene in a white, serif font.

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# CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE - My Wheeled Luggage Almost Ruined My Vacation .....	1
CHAPTER TWO - Barcelona, Spain .....	5
CHAPTER THREE - Suitcase .....	11
CHAPTER FOUR - Cartagena, Spain .....	13
CHAPTER FIVE - Cabo de Palos Lighthouse.....	29
CHAPTER SIX - Ibiza, Spain.....	33
CHAPTER SEVEN - Mixed Bag .....	45
CHAPTER EIGHT - Palma de Mallorca, Spain .....	57
CHAPTER NINE - Lost.....	81
CHAPTER TEN - Cassis, France.....	89
CHAPTER ELEVEN - Nice, France .....	99
CHAPTER TWELVE - Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France .....	107
CHAPTER THIRTEEN - Pisa, Italy .....	121
CHAPTER FOURTEEN - Lucca, Italy .....	127
CHAPTER FIFTEEN - Rome, Italy (Colosseum) .....	133
CHAPTER SIXTEEN - Rome, Italy (St. Peter's Basilica).....	137
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN - Rome, Italy (Trevi Fountain).....	147
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN - Naples, Italy (Mount Vesuvius).....	149
CHAPTER NINETEEN - Naples, Italy (Pompeii) .....	159
CHAPTER TWENTY - Barefaced and Baring My Soul .....	171
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	175

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**My Wheeled Luggage Almost Ruined My Vacation**



I knew I had a challenge when it came time to pack for our 10-night Mediterranean cruise. It would be an undertaking because we would be traveling to three different countries and sightsee in numerous ports. The weather was predicated to be sunny with temperatures in the mid-70s which would be a bit cooler than what I'd been accustomed to in Florida. That meant I would have to hunt through my closet for sweaters and a lightweight jacket. During the day, our itinerary indicated we should wear causal clothes such as khakis and T-shirts.

Packing for evening wear was going to be a bit more complicated, because two of the evenings were going to be formal nights. Freedom of the Seas requires guests to be dressed at least in a semiformal manner. That meant I needed to pack a cocktail dress or something I would wear to a nice wedding. For the rest of the dinner evenings the dress code was set as country club causal.

I also needed to pack my bathing suit, cover-up and sandals. Speaking of sandals, I needed to bring at least one pair of dress shoes and a pair of comfortable walking shoes.

The other items on my list to pack were not only my camera and my cellphone, but the chargers to go with them, my deaf alarm clock and the charger for my cochlear implant rechargeable batteries. Astoundingly all these items had to fit into only two suitcases.

Our airline allowed each customer one checked bag and for onboard, one personal item (purse, briefcase, laptop, etc.) which must fit under the seat in front of them, plus one carry-on bag of a size to fit in the overhead bin.

I started to pack a few days ahead of time in order to make sure everything would fit into my two pieces of luggage. I own luggage with spinner wheels which can easily glide in any direction, making it super convenient to navigate crowded, cramped spaces.

My husband, Paul Sprunk, and I were on the road by 4:00 a.m. We wanted to give ourselves enough time, in case of unexpected traffic, to

get to Miami International Airport. We arrived two hours later and decided to park our SUV in the airport parking garage.

After Paul turned the vehicle engine key off, I quickly retrieved my purse with the long shoulder-length strap and adjusted it across the front my body. I removed my two pieces of luggage from the back of the SUV and tucked both my lightweight jacket and a book under my right arm. With the two luggage pieces in tow directly behind me, I started down a slight slope leading to the direction of the distant entrance to the airport.

“Wait!”

Startled, I came to a sudden, complete stop. I turned in the direction of my husband’s voice. I thought something was terribly wrong.

“Let me carry your book,” he said, as he stretched his hand out.

As I reached for the book that had been tucked securely under my arm, I automatically let go of the wheeled carry-on luggage. Instantly it started rolling down the incline...at a rapid speed. I couldn’t risk losing this bag! It held my most valuable items, like all of my camera equipment and cochlear implant battery charger. I sprinted after the runaway suitcase while pulling the much larger bag. But the spinner wheels allowed the escaped suitcase to accelerate. In order to run faster I spontaneously let go of the larger suitcase. Just as I picked up speed, the carry-on bag hit a parked car, bounced off it and then continued downhill without hesitation. It just kept on rolling.

Unremittingly I flew after it. It wasn’t until the carry-on bag hit a second parked vehicle that it came to a complete stop. I finally caught up to the fugitive bag and when I did, I grabbed the bag as if it had been a misbehaving child. Looking up, I saw a few travelers watching. I turned around and glanced at my husband, who was still standing in the distance, laughing. Between him and me was my large piece of luggage standing squarely in the middle of the parking garage. Amazingly it had stayed put.

I was ever so grateful that no vehicles had driven by. In my mind’s eye I could see my most valuable suitcase being run over! If this was the

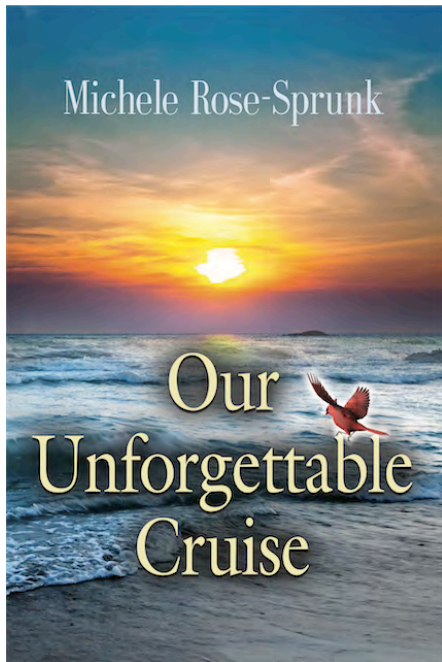
MICHELE ROSE-SPRUNK

beginning of what our vacation was going to be like, then it was a good indication that this was going to be an unforgettable trip!



*And so the journey begins....*





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