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USA Today

## Cruise ship report: Live blogging from the Carnival Pride

USA TODAY's Gene Sloan is blogging live this week from the Baltimore-based Carnival Pride.

MONDAY, 2:00 PM ET

Hi there, Cruise Loggers. It's me, Gene, and I'm on board the first cruise ship to be based year-round in Baltimore -- the Carnival Pride.

The 2,124-passenger vessel -- the second of four Spirit Class ships the line began rolling out in 2001 -- moved to the city in late April and sails a seven-night itinerary to Florida and the Bahamas.

The ambitious deployment marks the first time Carnival has ventured north of Florida with a ship year-round (until now the furthest north the line has gone year-round is Jacksonville, Fla.) and is the latest example of the trend toward "home porting" -- placing ships closer to the homes of cruisers.

What's it like to sail out of Baltimore -- and on a Spirit Class ship? I'll be on board the Pride all week along with hundreds of travel agents and executives from CruiseOne and Cruises Inc. as the travel agency groups hold their annual national conference on board, and I'll be posting my impressions and answering your questions below (leave your questions in the comment area).

MONDAY, 4:18 PM ET

What's it like boarding a ship in Baltimore? In a word, easy. Centrally located near the city's downtown and right off I-95, the Port of Baltimore is well-organized and blessedly hassle free. Arriving by car on Sunday, I found ample if slightly expensive parking (\$15 per day) literally steps away from the ship, short lines for both security screening and check-in, and friendly staff.

Baltimore also is a lovely city from which to sail -- at least on a crisp, sunny day like Sunday. As the Carnival Pride pulled out of the harbor late in the day, passengers lined the decks to admire the view of historic Fort McHenry (of Star-Spangled Banner fame) framed by the city's gleaming skyline in the background.

One of the drawbacks of sailing out of northern ports is that the weather can be a bit iffy - - at least for the first day of the cruise. And, indeed, it remained a bit chilly (and later rainy) today as the ship steamed southward off the coast of North Carolina.

Still, the Carnival Pride, like its Spirit Class sisters, is well-suited to sailing through areas of problematic weather as it comes with a retractable glass roof over one of two main pools (definitely in use today). It's no coincidence that Carnival also uses a Spirit Class ship for its voyages in often-chilly and rainy Alaska.