

## **Our Experience with Autism on the Seas**

By Mary McKinney

There are Autism Cruises on Royal Caribbean that are going out of Galveston twice in the next year, December and April. These cruises are priceless for families that suffer with Autism, Asperger's, PDD-NOS and sensory overload issues. The cruises are geared towards helping Autism children integrate into the vacation freedoms of life on board, and in the children's programs that have the "Autism on the Seas" (AotS) assistants to help your child stay in the program, while you go do your own thing.

For some reason, Autistic children 'come alive' the second they see the massive ship, walk the gangway, and board the ship. Even in the most severe autism cases, their sensory overload moves into excitement, and their stimulation is only positive the whole trip. The rocking of the boat soothes them and the feedback they get on the water is always positive. Most families report that their child only sleeps the whole night on the cruise!

AotS provides a private dining room, behind closed doors for the Autism families, so that mannerisms and eating issues are very private, and a family can feel without judgment on their special needs child. They also provide a quick entry from the dock unloading of suitcases through Customs, to boarding the gangway. It took my family 12 minutes from drop off to hitting the gangway, unheard of for anyone of any handicap or disability, except when traveling with AotS.

100% of the Autism Families that go on AotS cruises only have one option for vacation, and these cruises are it. Even if you have never considered cruising, consider AotS and offer your family a vacation like that of any other family, free of Autism's confines and enjoy the world out there with your family. Most families have a second child that is neurotypical, and they make friends too.

Mary McKinney

Autism Mom to 5 year old, Carson