

ARCADIA CRUISE – Southampton to Sydney



Monday 9 January 2012 – 12°

No more “To do Wedding” lists, now it's full on cruising. Rick's main concerns with the wedding preparations always centred around the champagne and wine and it's no different with the cruise. 4 bottles of Gin, 1 bottle of Champagne, 2 bottles of Cinzano, 1 bottle of Sherry and 6 bottles of wine are now sitting in the cabin wardrobe. All totally unnecessary as you can buy everything on board duty free. Rick is now worried that we are going to be left in short supply of export gin at home and is considering buying it on board and taking the plastic bottles back with us – he is forgetting that we will have to pay duty if we take them back into the country.

Anyway, this is our first time with P & O although when Rick's father was a P & O Captain, Rick and his mother went on a couple of cruises when he was a boy. The most memorable one was when they did Herculaneum and Pompeii in one day. He was so exhausted that he excused himself at dinner and went to the cabin, which he locked from the inside, and fell into a deep sleep. When his mother returned she couldn't get in, they tried shouting through a loud hailer, ringing the telephone and eventually had to break the door open.

First impressions are average although the brass band and firework send-off was good. 2000 passengers are a lot more than we are used to but this time we are not thinking everyone looks so old - we must be catching them up. Disappointed that we haven't got our table for two but we are on the waiting list and the head waiter said to see him at breakfast tomorrow – hopefully he means to sort out the table but he did wink at me!

Tuesday 10 January 2012 – 13° At Sea – average speed 21 knots

As my brain cells were finding it difficult to cope with the Improver's Bridge lesson I opted out of the 2.5 hour afternoon playing session. This left Rick without a partner and when they couldn't cope with the numbers wanting to play Rick joined me for a snooze at the Barcelona Port talk. The gym induction was also oversubscribed but by then the Bay of Biscay took over and as we haven't got our sea legs yet we had to spend the rest of the afternoon dosed up and lying flat. Managed to stay awake for some entertainment from the West End star Paul Baker. Met a couple who are on their ninth world cruise, they spend about £50K a year on cruises and used to be fans of Fred Olsen but fell out with them when they banned smoking. The passengers seem very friendly but then Rick is a magnet for all those old posh ladies.

Wednesday 11 January 2012 - 14° Force 2 - At Sea clocks forward 1 hr. - fantastic sunrise

Started the day by attending both the Beginners and Improver's Bridge. I'm really rusty and would

you believe it we played with Julia and Brian from Sidlesham which is just up the road from us. We then watched a Woody Allen film, it seems as if we are in a time warp. Fortunately we've recovered from the mal del mar and a pre lunch sherry was then in order which of course wiped out the afternoon. It's the Captain's Welcome Party. The great thing about cruises is that you get to wear all those lovely evening dresses, it's nice to dress up occasionally and there are very few times you can do it at home. I wish I hadn't made the mistake of telling Rick that we only dress to impress other women as he won't let it go. Another mistake was to let him know about hold-you-in-knickers. Back to the Captain's party, it was a bit of a farce as there were so many people but we made friends with a couple from Wimbledon. We're still on a table for six, our table companions Hilly and Stuart were on good form but the other two haven't shown up yet. Hilly and Stuart are very short, hopefully they won't read this, but Hilly is as wide as she is short. The comedian, Peter Piper was brilliant but I can't remember a single joke. When we returned to the cabin there was a present waiting for us, a P & O tea set, what a nice touch.

Thursday 12 January 2012 – 14° east wind 7 – 8 Part cloudy 23 knots slight swell

On waking Rick caught a glimpse of Gibraltar. The Bridge lessons are very popular and so noisy that it is difficult to concentrate. It seems there are a few different ways of scoring depending on the game you play – all very confusing. We didn't stay for the Improver's (they're extremely competitive) as I haven't had a chance to open my book yet. Watched another Woody Allen film, yesterday's was set in Paris, today's was set in Barcelona. Julie Ann Scott painted live for us; she paints in an abstract, Impressionist style, all a bit too modern for my taste. We can't stop sleeping and all the sleep is making me disoriented. Rick says I must report some of today's bad blond moments. I've forgotten the camera charger and keep losing things. However, I have managed to persuade our cabin steward to get us some dressing gowns (he says they are only really for the suites) and I got the water pressure sorted out. There was no way I would have ever been able to rinse my hair with the dribble that was coming out of the shower. The huge bed is fantastic but the television is too small for the room. We reach Barcelona tomorrow and will have travelled 1723 nms.

Friday 13 January 2012 – **Barcelona** 12° Bright and sunny



I've heard from Jen and they have now been married a week. Amazingly everywhere I look there are wedding shops, where were they when we were looking? Also, the first film onboard was "Father of the Bride" seen it at least 3 times, been there, don't have to worry anymore that we are doing all the right things. Jen and Hayden are somewhere in Maylasia in the middle of a rainforest, it's about 30 degrees with 100% humidity. They have monkeys in the hotel grounds and they upset the hotel this morning by throwing someone's room service plates over the balcony – that's the monkeys not Jen and Hayden.

Back to Barcelona, we took the Touristic open top bus for 24 euros each, it was really quite good value as you get a chance to see everything. Although it was bright and sunny it was cold and my nose is still very red. It didn't get chance to recover at lunchtime because of the red wine we consumed. We struck it lucky and found a restaurant outside the Ramblas that was full of locals and cost only 22 euros for a 3 course meal each, carafe of wine and coffee.

Barcelona is the second largest city in Spain after Madrid with a population of 1.7m. Being Spain's major Mediterranean port and the greatest centre of commerce and manufacture in the country it's a large and busy city. Hosting the 1992 Olympics brought a lot a regeneration to the city. The Gothic Quarter is the centre of the old city of Barcelona. Many of the buildings date from medieval times, some from as far back as the Roman settlement of Barcelona. There is lots of Art Nouveau which developed between 1885 and 1950 and left an important legacy in Barcelona. Antoni Gaudi's fantasatic work can be seen throughout the city. The Sagrada Familia church is his best-known work which has been under construction since 1882. It is being financed by private donations and is not expected to be completed until about 2026. Hope you like the picture. Actually, we didn't have time to do the Gothic Quarter properly, only ride through it. This is such an interesting city that you could come again and again and still find lots to do. I think the Sagrada Familia is amazing. Last time we to Barcelona we did the Gaudi tour so it was a nice change to get an overview of the city.

As I have forgotten my camera charger Rick is now in charge of photos and internet. At this very moment he is doing what he likes best and that is roaming round the ship trying to get an open network as the ships internet service is expensive.

