

Sunday 22 January 2012 – Cruising the Red Sea 22° – partly cloudy – 23 knots

This is our first P & O cruise. We are disappointed with the food. There is never the appearance of plenty – just enough. The quality of the food is average compared to other cruises we have been on. Being a bigger ship than we are used to you don't get to know entertainers and all the gossip. Most of the passengers are much more fit than we are used to and not all the men have big belly's. Also, there aren't so many mobility vehicles about and those with sticks are still quite mobile and don't mind a challenging walk or tour. The fitness instructor must have spent some time in the army as 5pm each evening he has "Boot Camp", it's killing. I've only just recovered enough to join in and am using the lightest weights. I can't believe how fit some of the much older ladies are. There have been a lot of complaints that there are not any art lessons and one of the passengers has offered to do them. Rick went today, it was well oversubscribed but they are going to give everyone who turned up free materials. The Bridge sessions are going well and the Sidlesham couple are good company even though they can never make breakfast. They have an apartment in Dubai as Brian used to work there. Hilly and Stu have lots of stories of previous holidays/cruises they have experienced, they are easy going. Jen and Hayden are relaxing in Sri Lanka and on Monday they fly to Bangkok and return to Chiswick and reality on Friday.

Safaga to Dubai 2692 nm

Monday 23 January 2012 – Cruising the Red Sea 27° – partly cloudy – 23 knots

It really has warmed up, lovely weather for cruising and sunbathing. Yesterday Rick said he would meet me after art in the usual sunbathing spot. I waited there all afternoon and was thinking that his art couldn't have gone on that long. Rick, who only spent 10 minutes at art as it was oversubscribed was sitting all afternoon on the deck above me thinking I couldn't possibly still be at the lecture. It was a lonely afternoon. Other ships we have been on the Captain has been seen around and would give us lots of interesting information. This one just gives our position, air pressure, speed and outside temperature. Another officer gave out the lunchtime info today and it was a pleasant change as he explained the origins of "son of a gun". In days gone past when women were allowed to sail with their husbands they would go up onto the gun deck to have their babies. Funny thing to tell us really as apart from the staff there can hardly be anyone else on board of childbearing age. I always thought it was a cowboy expression. We have got over our initial tiredness and are enjoying ourselves. Everything is very pleasant on board but there is no fun atmosphere. There are no real characters and I just have the impression of being in a large Rest Home. They seem to have a lot more formal nights than we are used to and people even tend to dress up on the casual nights. I'm holding my own at Bridge even managing to make some sneaky moves. Today's film, "Changeling" was really good, we went to the 5.45 pm showing which was very helpful as it was another one of our "no drinking" days – we do have them! Being previous passengers Stu and Hilly were invited to a special lunch. Hilly asked for some wine to go with her cheese but they said the wine was finished. Rick said it sounds as if they were stingy, Hilly replied that she didn't do too bad: a free glass of champagne, 2 white wines and 3 reds. Stu was still flying from the lunch and kept making me laugh, he has a cute smile. After he had slept off his lunch he went to the Talent Show which he thought was fantastic, he says a 100 strong choir has been formed. Later we were entertained with music from Vivaldi, Beethoven and Last Night of the Proms by the String Idols who have performed at the Royal Albert Hall and X Factor.

Tuesday 24 January 2012 – Gulf of Aden 25° – overcast – 23 knots – moderate wind

We got to Bridge before Julia and Brian and dealt out a hand to practice the bidding, Rick had a fabulous one and the tutor and his assistant joined us. Rick was quaking in his sandals as the tutor thought he could make a slam, ie all 13 tricks, he was fortunate he didn't have time before the lesson to play it. Where were Julia and Brian? Guess what, they were sitting behind us wondering where we were, a bit of deja vu. I've been resisting it but I succumbed to the "Detox and you will never need to diet again". I will say this for P & O there is no hard sell, you could see them after if

you needed help or a BMI, no thanks I know how much fat I have. A couple of interesting things came out of this the first being that you can burn about 300 calories in 30 minutes on the treadmill whereas you can burn almost twice that amount using weights. The second thing was that women have 240 lymph nodes in their stomach whereas men have only 180, maybe that is why men hold weight there.



We have been listening to Commander Martin Ewence OBE RN Chief of staff NATO Counter-Piracy Squadron who is reassuring us how well we are protected from piracy by ships from many nations. Pirates were doing really well in early 2011 but tactics were changed and broadly its now under control. Lots of pirates were killed, maimed or captured, the Danes have been mentioned a lot as being really good. The waters where we are sailing are a busy area for trade, world volume of trade is more than 90% by sea and the Middle East has 62% of the worlds oil reserves. The average ransom paid is 4.5 million USD and average length of detention is over 120 days. The pirates usually use 2 skiffs and a mother ship with 6 pirates in each and they are armed with a ladder, basic rifles and rocket propelled grenades, that's all they need. Many pirates have been killed and many captured and tried for piracy. At the moment we are using the internally recommended transit route and the big excitement today was when he told us that a fully loaded USS Destroyer carrying 61 surface to air missiles was sailing towards us at 30 knots. One of its helicopters flew over us and when the Destroyer passed us it flew the USA flag and many staff stood on board. Arcadia flew the British flag and it was a real Rule Britannia moment. Incidentally, no ship travelling over 18 knots or travelling in a convey has ever been hijacked so we are feeling quite safe. When you hear this chap speak it makes you so proud to be British.



Back to reality we've been to the cinema again this time "Shirley Valentine", viewed the galleys and sampled the Chocoholics feast. The catering department have 112 staff, creating 12,000 meals every day for over 2000 passengers and 950 crew. The chocolate cakes were stale.



Met an ex Marine who has a disabled wife, she is blind and in a wheelchair. What optimism and fantastic outlook, they are going all the way round the world and it's not the first time. They have managed to find tours they can cope with at every port. They say every day is special to them and I feel a little humbled in their presence. P & O have excellent cabins for disabled persons. More worrying than the pirates is that the UN are sending troop to the Straits of Hormuz where we are heading.

Wednesday 25 January 2012 – Arabian Sea 22° – overcast – 23 knots – wind force 6

Clocks went forward another hour, we are now 4 hours ahead of GMT. It's a bit rocky and time for Rick to take a pill. He has a new electronic toy to fiddle with all day as he is using my Kindle. Ever since I got it I haven't needed it as I always buy second hand books at the doctor's surgery or get given them as presents. I should never have said I was holding my own at Bridge, I was terrible today. As the sun decks were closed because of the strong winds we went to the BBC gardening presenter Steve Brookes question time to pick up a few tips. Use your vacuum dust to mulch your tomato plants, its full of dead skin cell, dust, animal and human hair and millions of decaying dust mites; put a banana next to your tomatoes to help ripen them; chop up banana skins to feed your roses with the potassium they crave; put dead pine needles round your lime hating plants such as rhododendrons and azaleas, tea bags are also great for these type of plants; male wee is great for rotting down the compost heap; to kill dandelions pour a little salt into its centre; best tip of all is to use a clear silicone sealant to attach climbers to a fence or wall. One of the other attendees at yesterdays detoxing seminar said she had heard that someone had lost 3lbs by drinking a solution of maple syrup, cayenne pepper, lemon and water. Do you know how the expression "It's cold enough to freeze the brass balls of a monkey" came about? Ships cannon balls used to be stored pyramid style on a brass frame called a monkey. When it got really cold the brass would contract and the balls would fall off. I supported the 100 strong passenger choir's 30 minutes of fame. It was good, I especially liked it when singing Delilah (my favourite karaoke song) the men gyrated their hips Tom Jones style, even the little man in a chair did it. We were told it was all their own hips! Rick's got his new set of paints out. No time for the cinema today as we are paying £10 each to go to the Orchid Restaurant. It was worth paying the extra as it felt special.

Thursday 26 January 2012 – Straits of Hormuz 22° – Cloudy– 21 knots – wind force 4 sea slight

We experimented with room service for breakfast again today and this time it was Rick who was restless and on edge until they arrived. It was okay but no hot food and our table isn't really big enough to lay it out. It was our last fun Bridge session, I know it should be serious but we now have what we call "Sue rules". The tutor who continually contradicts himself has already lined up our next partners who are Ruth and Jeff. We are just saying au revoir to Julia and Brian as we will

be seeing them for a friendly Bridge game on our return.



This morning we passed a British RN supply ship that is used for re-fuelling and re-provisioning the NATO Anti Piracy Task Force. I never thought I would get so excited at seeing a war ship but then we have been 5 days at sea. I wish I could remember all the missiles and guns it had but I know it was impressive.

I'm getting excited about tomorrow as we are having a lavish morning tea at the 7 star Burj Arab hotel, the one where they transformed the helipad into a tennis court. It's the only 7 star hotel in the world. It has 220 bedroom suites ranging from \$1000 - \$15,000 a night or you could stay in the Royal Suite for just \$28,000 a night. Then we have a catamaran cruise towards Palm Jumeirah. The project involves the creation of the world's three largest man-made islands known as The Palm Islands, it's unofficially known as the 8th wonder of the world. Can't wait to see it all.

Oh dear I have spent most of the afternoon and evening throwing up as I think I had some dodgy paella at lunchtime. Please let me be well for tomorrow!

Safaga to Dubai 2692 nm

Southampton to Dubai 6730 nm