

Thursday 8 March 2012 – At sea on way to Sydney 22° cloud with sunshine

It's our last day and we are reflecting on what was good and what was not so good.

Good things about this P & O cruise

Drinks are very reasonable and you can get drinks for your cabin at duty free prices

Well equipped cabin

Excellent itinerary for countries to visit

Informative port talks and they are repeated several times on the television

Plenty of sunbeds and sunbathing areas

Cosy and comfortable cinema but not really big enough for a ship of this size

They keep trying to sell you things like the American ships

The basics from the shop are reasonably priced

The Arcadia band were excellent as are the other musicians on board

The Headliners (Arcadia dancers and singers) are excellent

The main restaurant have made a real effort to try and adapt some of the recipes for me

Good launderette facilities

Not so good things about this P & O cruise

Poor quality and repetitive food

Belvedere buffet – dreadful layout, it doesn't flow. Most of the food is not labelled and when it is there is usually one sign just detailing the options. You then have to ask the staff what's what and they have no idea. Whenever I ask what dishes are gluten free they go away for ages and then come back and point them out but they are not always right. They don't use their initiative and find out about other courses at the same time. In fact the Head Chef knows that he is going to be asked this question, not just for gluten free but also for other dietary requirements and he should have this information on hand. In some instances the Head Chef doesn't even know himself.

They have had to discount parts of this cruise which has attracted people who are not interested in following a dress code. This sounds really snobby but it's all about expectation, if we were expecting it to be 3 star then we wouldn't have been at all bothered.

This is very much a 3 star cruise and not what we were expecting P & O to be. Other passengers who have previously travelled with P & O are disappointed that the quality and standards have gone down.

Although the itinerary is very good there isn't enough time at most of the ports. There have been no overnight stays. The latest we have stayed is in Hong Kong when we were due back on board at 12.30 am. Sometimes when we have arrived a little late the independents who want to go ashore have to wait until all the passengers on excursions have left the ship. At some ports like Cairns they only had about 3.5 hours in the town.

The lectures, television programmes and films are repeated. This is good for new passengers but not so good for those who have been on since Southampton.

Staff are miserable

Last Bridge session and Clive got caught red handed trying to confuse us by bidding when he had hardly any points. He doesn't take criticism well but they have been great to play with. When you have just completed a 60 night cruise it's living somewhere else and you can't really live all the time like you are on holiday. Believe it or not, we have drunk far less than a lot of the others on this cruise. I would say we have averaged about two bottles of wine a week which is far less than we have at home. Also, we haven't eaten between meals and have tried to choose wisely, mostly fish and vegetables and not too many

deserts. I have slipped a bit in recent weeks because Lisa and I have got the chef experimenting with some deserts. He had great success the second time he tried a GF soufflé but he hasn't managed to perfect the sponge pud yet. Both of us have exercised much more than we usually do, so by now you are probably thinking they must be really thin and fit. Sorry, that is not so, we are both fatter, maybe a bit fitter but definitely not thinner and we still have a week in Sydney to go.

Had they got the food right we would have said this has been a fantastic cruise. Tonight was really good as Lisa had booked us all into a wine tasting evening in one of the pay extra restaurants. We tried to get a glass of champagne each beforehand but they had run out of the one we wanted and then we ran out of time. How do you get a drink on this ship? I happened to say "Don't you think we have been really good, we have only had a couple of bottles of wine a week". This statement was received with great astonishment and hilarity as they all said "What about all that alcohol you have in your bedroom". We are going to miss Lisa trotting about carrying her little handbag, shy David drinking his beer and watching the sport, Hilly and cheeky Stu with all their holiday stories.

It just doesn't seem real that we will be getting off tomorrow and I suppose it won't seem real until we have been home a couple of weeks and have had time to reflect on all we have seen and done. There has been very little to buy that you can't get back home and in most cases things are a much cheaper in the UK. It's a lot of countries we have visited but I still think England is the best in the whole wide world and mainland Europe comes a good second.

Brisbane to Sydney 478 nm

Friday 9 March 2012 – Sydney 26° sunny



View from cabin



Springfield Lodge

Yesterday Sydney had almost a month's worth of rain in a single day, enough to fill 47,400 Olympic pools, one fifth of Sydney harbour or 9.48 billion glasses of champagne. Today it's fantastic weather, 26° and sunny. First impression of Springfield Lodge was that it wasn't bad as there are some tables in the front serving food and the clientèle looked a bit arty, the reception was very obliging and I thought that we were going to be alright. Then we saw our room, it is quite small, it does have a few interesting features but the window has frosted glass to cover the non view, the furniture is very basic and the shower door keeps falling off. We can cope with all of this but we can hear everything that goes on above us. We booked it because it was half the price of somewhere central and they don't seem to have any deals here like London. We then ventured out along Darlinghurst Road and it was just as we have been told, full of strip shows, prostitutes, night clubs, massage and tattoo shops and drunks and it's a backpacker's paradise. You get a bit curious to see this sort of thing but my heart went out to a prostitute outside Kings Cross Station who looked such a mess and so drugged up. However is she ever going to escape. I have always tried to encourage Jen to be a bit more adventurous and go back backing but thank goodness she wasn't interested.



Darlinghurst Road



The Art Gallery – a fine building

We walked what seemed like miles into Sydney and back to the hotel stopping for a visit to the Art Gallery, a tasty lunch and a visit to the Chinese Garden in Darling Harbour. It was very similar to that of a Japanese Garden, very interesting and more so as there was a wedding being held overlooking the main lake. In the evening we ate outside at the hotel restaurant, the food was good and the customers were mostly groups of girls and a bohemian types. Afterwards we thought we would take a walk up the dreaded Darlinghurst Road. It was very lively and made us feel very old. A couple of policemen on horses at the end of our road were keeping the peace.

There's no Robert tonight to turn back the bed and put a chocolate on our pillow.



Saturday 10 March – Sydney & St Ives 24° – Sunny and partly cloudy

It was surprisingly quiet in our hotel last night, as it's in a residential area they finish serving in the restaurant at 10 pm and lock the front door at 11 pm. Rick's fixed the shower door and we have discovered a really good Harris Farm supermarket right opposite. Don't know how we missed it yesterday but it is a new glass fronted building. Lorne collected us in his retro Bentley to take us to their new home in St Ives which is about 30 minutes outside the city. For the past 14 years they have been living in a tiny terraced house in the middle of Sydney. They are only just getting used to having so much space as they have only been in St Ives for about six weeks. The house is on a hill at the end of a cul del sac, it has lots of rooms, and a covered patio area overlooking the swimming pool. Apart from all the space the best bit is the view from the back of the house as they overlook a woodland that stretches for miles and leads down to a river. When they first moved in they couldn't get used to hearing just the sounds of the birds and cicadas. We all went out to lunch of oysters and fish at a restaurant overlooking a marina. Lorne drove us back into Sydney and dropped Homer off as he was going to a party.



Time for another walk into the city, this time we went down Victoria Street as Carolyn had said there were some attractive Victorian terraces and lots of restaurants. Once again we found ourselves at Finger Wharf in Woolloomooloo Bay. There is a colony of about 20,000 fruit bats roosting in the nearby Botanical Park. The sky was black with them, they are damaging the rare trees and there is an order to get rid of them but it keeps being postponed because they are a threatened species. The old port buildings which have been converted in bars and restaurants were buzzing. Tomorrow we are meeting up with a friend Robert who lives in Sydney and then on Monday we are off with Lorne and Carolyn to a country retreat in the Hunter Valley. Unfortunately, Homer who is 17 won't be able to join us because he is in his final year of high school. We've taken the plunge and booked the final two nights in Springfield Lodge, It's not too bad and we can't be bothered with all the hassle of moving hotels.

