

Australia and New Zealand

Saturday 11 February/ Sunday 12 February 2023

We left home at 3am for a Qatar Flight to Sydney via Doha. Landed at Sydney 8pm on 12 Feb after 30 hrs travelling. It was another two hours before we finally got to the Marriott Quayside Hotel at 10pm and the bars were all closed.



Doha Airport, it's enormous

Monday 13 February

Fantastic breakfast for about £20 each, they have a whole island full of gluten free goodie's and I managed to try most of them. Several types of danish pastries, lots of mini cakes, doughnuts, muffins, banana bread and more, more, more - a coeliac's paradise. Tomorrow I'm going to start on the breads and croissants.



Rick forgot some of his pills so once again, as what seems to happen on every holiday, we were off to find a doctor to give him a prescription and a pharmacy to dispense them. It was money well spent (only about £47) as the doctor gave him a MOT and prescribed a different puffer for his asthma. We managed to get our bearings for the next task of finding the train station to take us to Turramurra to see his son Lorne.



We hadn't seen Lorne since 2012 and we had never met his new partner Bea or her 7 year old daughter, Evie. Their house is in a leafy road surrounded by lots of very tall trees. They have a mature garden with loads of giant agapanthus and box hedges. After watching a YouTube video Lorne and Bea spent months making a wooden fence which they are proud of. We had lunch in the garden and caught up with all their news. It was lovely to see them so settled and comfortable. An excited Evie came back from school early to meet us.

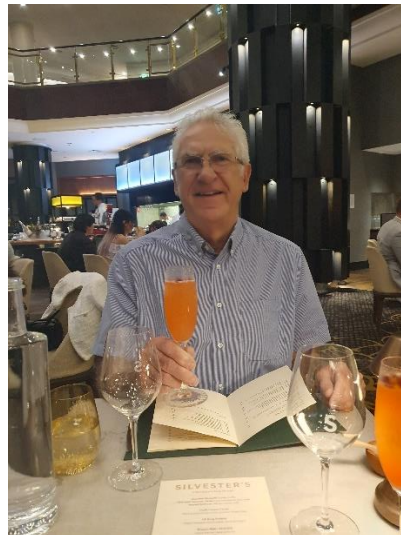


We made it back to the hotel just in time for our PCB industry friend Robert to pick us up and give us a tour of the best views of the harbour. We had supper in The River View pub in Balmain, with not really to be recommended live music, the loud clarinet kind of spoilt it. We heard how Robert and his family had progressed since we last saw him here in 2012. It hasn't been plain sailing, but his three daughters who are now in their late twenties have been through university here and all have what appears to be exciting jobs. Unfortunately, his wife Claire didn't join us as since becoming a freelance editor, is rushed off her feet trying to meet deadlines. The family have settled well in Sydney. Our jet lag not too bad.

Tuesday 14 February

Been awake since 4am coughing and full of cold. We have a completely free day, however, it's pouring with rain. Robert gave us a few ideas of where to go if that should happen but feeling lazy. I read through one of my earliest cruise diaries and can't believe how active we used to be, filling in every minute of the day. Getting worried as we must complete a pre cruise health questionnaire where you have to tick the box if you have a headache, sore

throat, cough, runny nose etc - I have all of those. Took some pills to help dry it up, fell asleep and the next thing I know it's 5pm and the rain has stopped. Took a stroll down to the harbour, it's just minutes away as the hotel is very well positioned. There are just fantastic views everywhere you look. The numerous bars and restaurants were packed and really buzzing. A brilliant place to people watch. We saw where we will board our boat on Thursday. The hotel is filling up with cruise passengers. Our huge breakfast kept us going all day, but we were starting to get hungry and being it was Valentines Day we opted to eat at the hotel as most places were booked out. What a good decision that was as we had a fabulous meal.



Wednesday 15 February

The weather has settled and it's about 24 degrees. We stopped at The Opal Museum on our way to check out where we were meeting Lorne tonight. At home I have a wonderful bracelet with pearly coloured opals that we bought in Hong Kong, but it seems they are the least valuable. I didn't really like the more expensive darker ones. The Crown Restaurant where we are going tonight is in the newly completed, tallest building in Sydney. We are finding our way around quite easily now. Wandered back to the hotel stopping at the Victoria Shopping Mall with its famous clock. We just missed the hour when it does all sorts of things but fortunately, we witnessed that on a previous trip. Things don't seem quite so expensive as in 2012, you halve the Australian dollars to get roughly the number of £'s. The chap in the museum thought that the UK was in dire straits. He thinks now the Queen has died many of the Commonwealth countries will become Republics. We got dehydrated during the walk and slept most of the afternoon. My sleep pattern is all over the place. There are restaurants and drinking establishments everywhere nearly all packed, this place is buzzing.



Lorne, Bea, Evie and Homer had taken the train and met us the restaurant. It was a wonderful evening. We found that Rick, Lorne and Homer all have a bit of the Dr Spock syndrome, that is taking everything you say literally. It was a very high-class restaurant and we pushed the boat out. Evie who is only seven coped very well as it was a long and late evening for her with school the next morning. We had “elephant’s ears” which were ribs of veal, that she thought they were real. The restaurants party trick was that one of the waiters would make fresh pesto at your table using a large pestle and mortar. A memorable evening for us all and so lovely seeing Rick bonding with his son and grandson.



Thursday 16 February

Another sleepless night, I shouldn’t have had that afternoon nap and my tummy is out of sorts. My cold is under control and we both tested negative for Covid which was essential for our entry on Celebrity Eclipse ship. I booked the cruise in 2020 and got a brilliant deal of just over £10k for both of us which includes flights, hotel stay, transfers, gratuities, wifi and drinks packages and a concierge cabin. We wheeled our cases from the hotel to the ship as it was just minutes away. I can only say good things about The Marriott at Circular Quay, its position, service and food quality were excellent. It was baking hot and we had early access and were on the ship by midday.



Very pleased with our room and balcony. Not quite so pleased with the wifi package as it was just basic, you can't send pictures and is for only one device at a time. Same with the drinks package anything over \$12 you pay the difference. The most ridiculous thing is there is no drinking water in the cabin only a large bottle of sparkling water for \$7. Will have to sort something out there. Drinks by the pool area were weak but fine. We enjoyed the music and the wonderful scenery as we left Sydney Harbour on our way to New Zealand.



We have booked a table for two each evening in Moonlight Sonata restaurant. Chatted to couple on table next to us who have a shoe company called Moshulu based in Penzance.

The Martini Bar is the place to be, and they make a really good margarita. Food so far also very good.



Friday 17 February – At Sea

At last, a reasonable night's sleep but confused over the time as the clocks went forward an hour and not sure if our phones and iPad are showing the correct time. Rick found the pills he thought he had lost tucked inside one of his shoes. Breakfasted with Dave and Rita (Scotland) and Michael and Phyllis (Arizona). Rick mentioned he is allergic to cats and Dave's daughter has just adopted a 9 year old cat with HIV and another daughter paid £1000 for her special cat. Ricks very taken with the Faberge Eggs by Theo Faberge. One of the good things about cruising is you get to meet really interesting people like the newly married, retired surgeon who set up a pain relief clinic in London. The Martini Bar is still our favourite, restaurant service tonight a bit rushed but food very good. In December last year there was a Covid outbreak on board affecting between 500 - 1500 persons. The Formal Evenings have been replaced by Chic Evenings, not quite so dressy.



Saturday 18 February – At Sea

Another day at sea. Explored the ship, it was bigger than we thought. Fascinated by the nearly new/pre-owned designer handbags on sale, they averaged about £1500. There was one I particularly liked. The assistant said you would have to have a private plane as there is no way you could put it in the overhead lockers – I do have a big birthday coming up!



Guarding the expensive handbag

Took advantage of the sunny weather, about 24 around the pool by joining in with the Dancing and Water Aerobics.



There is a change to our itinerary, last week a tropical cyclone hit the north of New Zealand and the Napier port has been closed due to impact of flooding and landslides in that area. We are making the most of having an exceptionally calm, warm crossing. Chatted to a retired Prison Officer and his wife who had a few good stories. They spend most of the winter in Portugal. Finished the evening off by dancing to 70 & 80's music, a very late night for us.

Sunday 19 February – Sailing through Milford, Doubtful and Dusky Sounds

Around 7am we started our journey through the Milford Sound fjords. we appeared small in comparison to the towering cliffs covered in lush trees and fauna. The mountain tops were hidden by the low cloud, mist and gentle rain. There were a couple of waterfalls but plenty of

places where they run when the rainfall is right. This world heritage site is a haven for all types of wildlife: fur seal colonies, penguins and dolphins. It rains so much here that there is 6 metres of fresh water on top of the sea water.



Onto Doubtful Sound which is the deepest of the Fiordland National Park. It's considered more spectacular and relaxing than Milford Sound. It was pouring with rain so didn't really see much.



Finally, the rain cleared and next was Dusky Sound with its steep cliffs that have been carved over centuries by waterfalls which surround the largest and most complex of the many fjords along the New Zealand coast. I was disappointed not to see more wildlife, but we did see a pod of dolphins.



Lunch next to a retired Hawaiian GI Navy Officer and his British wife. We must have talked to her for about an hour, but he never said a word.

Brilliant evening, saw Magic Show with Jeremy Tan then full-on ABBA dancing. It was wonderful to see so many people embracing it. Onto another bar with Jorge and his guitar where we met up with a very friendly Canadian crowd.



Fun at the Martini Bar

Rick has got himself into a pickle today as he thought we had a free bottle of sparkling wine in our cabin each night. Turns out only the first one is free. Our cabin steward has found a bottle that he will give to us. I feel very uncomfortable about this and won't drink it unless we pay for it which is a bit pointless as we have a drinks package. We only have British currency; Rick will have to sort this.

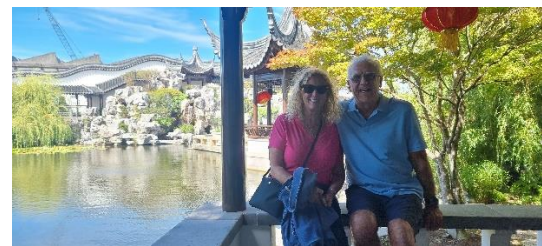
Monday 20 February - Dunedin



It's a beautiful morning and we took a 30 min coach ride into Dunedin known for its Scottish and Māori heritage, Victorian and Edwardian architecture and large student population. Rod Stewart is performing at the stadium in April. First impressions were good, love the backdrop of gentle rolling hills and the calm atmosphere. First stop the 1906 impressive Railway Station that is currently being renovated and is the most photographed building in New Zealand. At its peak up to 100 trains a day steamed through. There was an Art exhibition upstairs and also a Sports Museum. The tracks are now only used for freight.



There was a glass sided display building with an old steam engine inside. A thin, frail looking old man volunteer talked to us while clutching his puffer. It was difficult to understand what he was saying but the gist of it was he was fed up keeping having to repeat himself because these cruise trippers didn't turn on their hearing aids. Each time we tried to escape he would say "I'm not finished yet". There were quite few "I'm not finished yet" before we were able to escape.



Onto the excellent, beautifully presented free Toitu Otago Museum. This was a good opportunity to understand a little of the Dunedin history - the gold rush, transport, home appliances and culture.

The Chinese Gardens were our final stop. The Chinese were invited here to help relieve the shortage of workers during The Otago Gold Rush of the 1860's which brought wealth and laid the foundations for Dunedins rich heritage.

The coastline is a seabirds paradise: albatross, penguins, shags, spoonbills, oystercatchers and sooty shearwaters. Only being in port for a few hours meant we had to choose between the wildlife or the city, even then we still didn't get to see all that we wanted.

Our usual restaurant was busy, we missed Bern our wine waiter and our waiter Angel from Honduras with the long fingers who said he got those by milking his cows.

Achmad, our cabin steward is sick, and Wendy has taken his place. Rick had settled on £20 to give him for the sparkling wine, so that will have to wait. I wouldn't be surprised if he hasn't been sacked.

Tuesday 21 February - Christchurch

Christchurch has almost been completely rebuilt since the 2011 and 2012 earthquakes. The scenery is much like Dunedin but busier. For a while, to help keep the city going, shipping containers were used as temporary shops. The destruction caused by the earthquakes gave the City Planners an opportunity to redesign the city and a maximum height of the new buildings are 28 metres and the construction is of glass and steel.



The quaint "Hop on and Off" tram dropped us off at the Gothic Arts Centre that used to be the university and is now a performing arts centre and cinema. We then went to the huge, newly built Art Gallery Te Puna O, some really weird stuff there. For instance, there was a large circle on the floor of Y Front pants, each had different types of fruit coming out the gussets. Stopped for coffee and cake at the Botanic Park. Unfortunately, no gondola ride as they were over subscribed. There is a thriving coffee culture going on here, coffee shops everywhere. There is still a lot of rebuilding and renovation going on but it's amazing how they have managed to rebuild an entire city in 8 years.



We were docked at Lyttelton but ran out of time to explore the port, more piles and piles of lumber tree trunks with a continuous stream of lorries delivering them.

Leo the Captain gives us updates each day and always end with some inspirational advice he has received from his father or grandfather. « Leo, the best thing you can learn is common sense but the people who need it most don't take it. ». Spent most of the evening booking tickets for ABBA Voyage to celebrate my 70th birthday.

Perfect day 29 degrees clear blue sky.

Wednesday 22 February - Wellington

We are in the capital city of Wellington today, strong winds through the Cook Strait give it the nickname of « Windy City ».

The couple next to us at breakfast only live only just up the road from brother Don, small world isn't it. More stacks and stacks of tree trunks at the port. Free shuttle into town, last two places we been to it's been €10 return each.



Took the cable car up the hill where we were met by free transport to Zealanda Nature Reserve. Everywhere we have been so far there have been friendly, helpful volunteers to welcome and guide us. Zealanda, is a well-managed conservation eco sanctuary where we got to see amongst others, a rare flightless bird called takahe, a rare reptile called tuatara and very difficult to spot stick insects.

If we thought the Christchurch Museum was impressive it was nothing compared to The Te Papa museum. All the exhibit explanations had a Māori translation. We only did a couple of floors as it was exhausting and we wanted to get back before the rain.



Rick's having a bad day, first he loses his cruise card, then the cabin steward threw away his sparkling wine (the bottle we haven't paid for yet as Achmad is still sick or sacked), then he cut himself badly whilst shaving and to top it all his shirt was badly creased so he covered it with his jacket which was also creased. You have to show your passport and cruise card each time you return to the boat. Luckily someone had handed in Rick's card.

Thursday 23 February – At Sea, as Napier Port closed

We have an unexpected day at sea as we are unable to visit Napier because of the damage caused by Cyclone Gabrielle which has been described as one of the worst storms to hit New Zealand. Two days ago, Napier Airport recorded its wettest February day since records began. It has been declared a disaster zone with raw sewage spills and looting. Weather at sea today is bad, heavy rain and poor visibility but the ship is not going up and down too much. No lazing by the pool or joining in with the line dancing and Aqua Aerobics. Instead, we are spending the day away chatting to people. Enjoyed watching Maverick in the cinema. I also did a lot of eating today, taking advantage of all the gluten free food, had two lunches – pizza, fish and chips, sticky toffee pud and trifle plus 3 glasses wine and that was just lunch. I feel sorry for the staff, the restaurant steward who comes from Bali has a one year old and a four year old and has been on the ship for 7 months. She goes home next week.

I'm enjoying not having to make the bed, tidy up, or think about what to cook, it's a real holiday.

17 degrees today and tomorrow.

Friday 24 February – Tauranga

We are docked in Tauranga in the Bay of Plenty, flat landscape overlooking Mount Maungatapu. It's New Zealand's largest port (more lumber) and one of its fastest growing cities.



Forecast was right, it's raining and there was an enormous queue for the "Hop on and Off Bus". We were crammed into what was a Covid incubator and had to stand for quite a while as no one wanted to get off. The sandy beaches must be very inviting on a dry day where you could partake if you were not too old or too lazy to do lots of water sports. If it had been sunny weather, we could have spent the day on one of the beautiful sandy beaches. Rick wanted to get off at the Aviation Museum but we would have had to wait ages to get back on the bus again. After doing the round trip we complained that there weren't enough buses, no ventilation and no commentary. We got a 50% refund in real currency, first time we have seen real money. A disappointing visit and not even one photograph taken.

Chatted to a London painter/ decorator and his wife. In his teenage years he was a Teddy Boy and then a Rocker and now a motorbike enthusiast. We both fell asleep at the show.

Saturday 25 February - Auckland



Our last few hours in New Zealand were spent in the port of Auckland, very different to the other cities we've visited as there are high rise buildings and it's surprisingly cosmopolitan. We weren't there for long, just wandered around the harbour admiring the expensive yachts and restaurants. We found the Maritime Museum very interesting but tiring. It would have been nice to have had the time to venture inland to see the dormant volcanoes or maybe some sheep. We've only spotted a few in a field in Dunedin, I was led to believe there was nothing but sheep in New Zealand.



Sunday 26 February – At Sea

Things have changed a lot since our last Celebrity cruise in 2015 when it was all sell, sell, sell. Gone has the perpetual photograph taking and there is generally a much more relaxed atmosphere. The staff are excellent, but the entertainment is much more low key. Apparently, The Eclipse is Celebrity's oldest ship and all the good stuff gets transferred to the newer ones. There are 2700 guests on this cruise and 1500 including us are staying on for the Barrier Reef cruise.



It was a Sea Day again and fortunately the weather was good, around 20°. We tried to pace the amount we are eating and drinking, didn't do too bad but still too much. A lazy day sitting for most of it undercover by the pool. I'm only doing about 6000 steps a day whereas at home I've usually done about 4000 by 10am. Booked our next French visit, everything takes so long with limited wifi and Ricks credit card has been blocked because they think some transactions are suspect. He got it sorted the other day but they've blocked it again. All domestic stuff, difficult to sort at sea. Had my nails done by an Indian girl who was impossible to understand. There are loads of staff everywhere and the ship is being constantly cleaned.

Dressed up in our finery for the Evening Chic events, sing along to Queen and listen and sing along to Oz Boys, mostly Motown. Back to our normal restaurant with our waiter, long fingered Juan and Bern pouring the drinks.

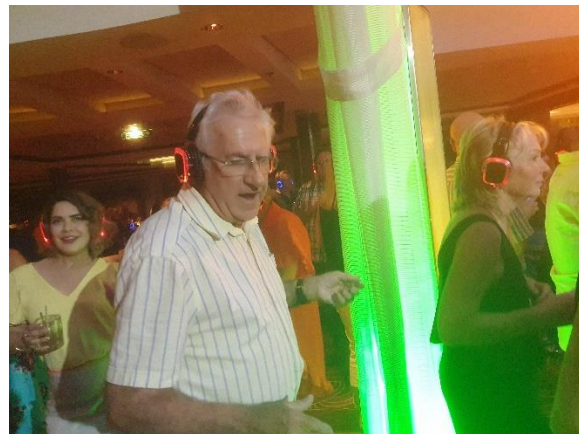
Monday 27 February – At Sea

Another sea day and we were blessed with calm, warm weather so the morning was spent by the pool. Rick loves the sing along, happy music especially "Live it up" by Mental as Anything. There was the usual quiz where you have to guess the name and artist of a song. Once again we failed miserably, loads of people are brilliant at all the different quizzes. There were two before lunch, the second one was to guess things beginning with

different letters, for example: what you take on holiday beginning with S and things by the pool beginning with D. We were even rubbish at that! The cafe with proper filtered coffees has become another favourite hangout. We ventured into the buffet for lunch, I lost Rick and almost had to sit on my own. We've reduced our portions but so difficult to resist the Indian section. It had clouded over after lunch so Rick went into the IT room to do some ICT work. I stuck an hour and 1 half of Tar, it was very boring. We had to change our French trip dates on Brittany Ferries when we discovered that Rick had booked bikes as our form of transport. It appears to be very expensive to travel by bike as we only had to pay £57 extra for the car and rear bike rack.



The evening show was performed by the cruise performers who did music from shows and they were fantastic. Almost half the guests are leaving tomorrow and Captain Leo came to say goodbye, lots of staff paraded through the theatre for us to applaud. Rick's having another cocktail day, we can't seem to get the g & t's to taste like ours at home. Finished the evening off at the Silent Disco.



28 February - Sydney

We are once again in Sydney overlooking the spectacular Opera House and Ferries. We have to disembark and go through customs after which we took a walk to the Botanic Gardens. Sydney really is a wonderful city.



Back on board new passengers are wandering around looking lost just like we were 12 days ago. There were Covid test kits in our cabin, fortunately we are negative but if we tested positive we would have had to stay in our cabin for 5 days. Settled ourselves by the pool, drinking cocktails, reading, doing puzzles, enjoying the hot tub and taking a swim in one of the pools.



We tried booking an excursion but they all seem to be booked up and are very expensive. Rick is not keen as he gets sea sick and doesn't think his breathing is good enough to snorkel. I'm insisting we try to do something as we can't come all the way and not have some sort of a Barrier Reef experience. We eventually booked a glass bottom boat and snorkelling trip from Cairns. The Oz Girls entertained us in the theatre but they weren't up to last night's standard. Another night of fine dining in the Murano restaurant. Excellent food but over the top service, lots of bowing and scraping - can't stand it. Coming back from the loos you are met with "so pleased to welcome you back madam".

Wednesday 1 March - Eden



Shot out of bed, emptied all our medicines, toiletries and rubbish out of bag so I could fit all the swimming stuff in it. Put on my swimming costume and pondered about what shoes to wear. Rushed to do my daily Duolingo and it hit me that the excursion isn't until Sunday. We are in the small town of Eden that has a long history of whaling, the first whaling station being built in 1828. The early whalers formed a special relationship with the killer whales who worked with them by herding the baleen whales into the Twofold Bay where they would be rewarded by being given the tongue and lips of the humpback whales. The Whale Museum is home to the skeleton of Old Tom, the last of the herding killer whales. The Whaling industry has been replaced by fishing and tourism. Every year between September and November the region plays host to thousands of humpbacks heading to Antarctica. It was a twenty minute walk uphill to the town which reminded us of a western town, one Main Street with old fashioned low level buildings. Quite a lot of shops, cafes and businesses. The locals were displaying their handicrafts and playing music, they put on a good show for the visitors.



Lunched next to a couple of widows, both who have fond memories of The Marco Polo, as have we.

Afternoon spent once again by the pool drinking cocktails and finishing off Ken Follet's "A Dangerous Fortune" and final drink in the bar by the lawn. So full and tired but managed to eat a little while chatting to a Brisbane lesbian couple. They work at a Detention Centre which is now mostly used for people going out of the country. If someone is imprisoned for more than a year they lose the right to stay, some are allowed to eventually regain their immigration status but most are deported. Had a message to say that we are now booked onto the ship's Barrier Reef trip from Port Douglas. It's over £150 each, they are too late and too expensive, we've made alternative arrangements.

Thursday 2 March – At Sea

Clocks have gone back another hour, starting to feel a little homesick. Rick isn't homesick at all, he has a Solitaire app on his phone which is keeping him very occupied, I don't think he has read any books. This cruise cost in total £10,948 and included return flight to Sydney, 4 nights in hotel, all transfers, 12 night New Zealand cruise and 10 night Barrier Reef cruise. We have a well positioned, centrally located cabin with a balcony also included is a Drinks and Wifi package. We are Concierge Class which includes a few extras: a bottle of sparkling wine on arrival, canapés every afternoon, bathrobes, hairdryer, use of golf umbrella and binoculars, a key holder, Celebrity tote bag and a pillow menu. Services that are included are dedicated onboard Concierge, priority embarkation and disembarkation and exclusive events such as Concierge Cocktail Party, lunches and Destination Presentations. We are 9800 nautical miles from Big Ben.



Another lazy day by the pool, we've been very lucky with the weather. It's too hot today to sit in the full sun and once again we have a calm sea.

I was bejewelled and dressed in my finery as it was Chic Night. I wore my black high heels which were very uncomfortable and a nightmare to walk in. The show was amazing, a mixture of song, dance and acrobats. We were given a glass of fizz on our way into a special dinner. The evening was finished by an Abba sing and dance along, Rick's even loving Abba now.

Leo the Captains grandfather says "Leo learn from the mistakes of others, you cannot learn them all by yourself."

Friday 3 March -At Sea

Another lazy day by pool but I couldn't relax, it was very hot. It was late afternoon when we entered into the Barrier Reef. You don't really see anything, just a darkened ring on the sea. Whilst trying to get my steps up I came across a "help yourself ice cream machine". We haven't had any ice cream yet so I started to make a whippy one but couldn't stop it coming and coming and coming. It filled up all the tray and was melting as it came out and ran onto the deck. Panic, panic until I eventually got my brain into gear and pushed the handle in the right direction. Sundowners at the Sunset Bar by Lawn Bar.



We were booked into the Sushi restaurant but there was some sort of mix up and they weren't expecting us. We were led to believe that there were plenty of gluten free options but found we needed to order in advance. It was all very awkward as we had paid extra, we were made to feel uncomfortable especially when the restaurant manager got annoyed when we said this wasn't working for us. Back to the main restaurant with smiley Juan and Bern who of course were very pleased to see us. Early night.

Saturday 4 March – Airlie Beach



Thought we had overslept but my mobile had gone berserk again and was 3 hours ahead, it was 27 deg at 6am. There is an ongoing dispute about having cruise ships coming to the port and they sent the wrong boats to help with the tendering. It was about 11am before we got off and a lot of people were getting frustrated.

Airlie Beach is on the Coral Sea and is a good base for exploring the spectacular archipelago of the Whitsunday Islands and the aquatic wonders of the Great Barrier Reef. Very lush, green and tropical scenery. The town had to be almost totally rebuilt after Cyclone Debbie in 2017, that is why everything looked clean and modern, It wasn't safe to swim in the sea because of the jellyfish but there was a lovely clean lagoon where we had a paddle. We're getting nervous whether we will be in time for tomorrow's trip that we booked independently .



The evenings show was amazing a reworking of some classical favourites with singers, dancers and acrobats. We had our first Petit Chef experience where they video information about the meal onto the table, very clever. At last we managed to get the gins to our liking and for the first time we felt woozy so no late night dancing.

Sunday 5 March – Cairns

We collected our tender pass at 6.45 and exited the ship at 9am, still very nervous that we wouldn't make our trip in time. There was a 30 minute tender ride followed by a 30 minute coach trip from Yorkies Knob into Cairns. Captain Cook repaired his boat in this area and the city has its roots as an industrial town that produced timber and sugar. Torrential rain welcomed us, we were absolutely drenched by the time we caught the boat for a 50 minute journey to Green Island .



Green Island is very small (29 acres or 12 hectares) and is surrounded by abundant marine life and coral gardens and is the only cay on the Barrier Reef with a rainforest. It was a small paradise that included a sandy beach and a swimming pool. We were straight onto the glass bottom boat where we were given lots of interesting information from our guide Andy, who had been pulled out of retirement to help with the labour shortage. We were going to go snorkelling from the sandy beach but it bucketed down again, also I was nervous about the jellyfish as it was a high risk day.



View of the coral from the glass bottom boat

We sought shelter in the Crocodile Park just in time to see the turtle and crocodiles being fed. The ship's catamaran ride back to Celebrity Eclipse was really exciting as we were sitting outside in the pouring rain getting absolutely soaked and windswept. We booked this trip through Viator and it cost in total £150.60, less than half the price of the ship's excursion.

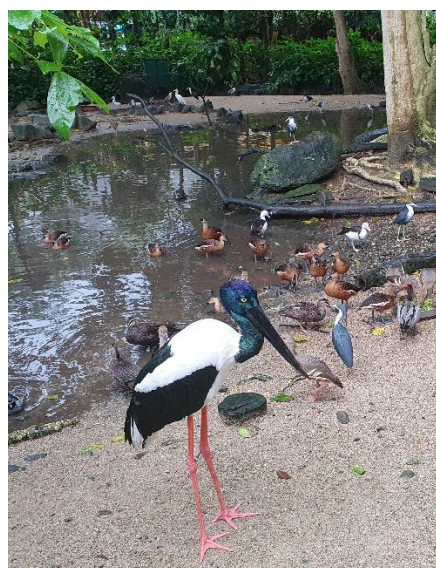


Rietta Austin, who is the female voice from Strictly entertained us tonight, her range was astonishing as she could sing opera, Dolly, Adele, Tina Turner and almost anything. Got stuck next to a table of four which reminded us why we stick to a table for two - they were fussy, complainers and extremely boring.

Monday 6 March – Port Douglas



Forecast for Port Douglas was for rain all day but the good news is that they were wrong, it was sunny, hot and humid but did cloud over a bit in the afternoon. We've finally got the tendering sorted and we were in the port by 8.30. No worries about getting an excursion as loads were being offered.



We very much enjoyed the Wildlife Habitat centre and got to see Australian wildlife living in free roaming enclosures. Lots of koalas, kangaroos, loads of different birds, snakes and ducks. You could even swim with the crocodiles - definitely a no, no . We walked back through the town and bought a couple of presents. The port was full of huge yachts and we had a very pleasant journey back to the boat on top of one of Celebrity's tenders, Really love every place we have seen, the people and the way of life. We spent £10.16 on Hop on and off

Bus and £40.76 entrance to the Wildlife Habitat (total £51.02) whereas if we booked with the cruise company it would have been approx £248.



Tonight's show was Topper, the enigmatic Sir Peabody keeps his eccentric friends, both real and imaginary locked in his giant hat. The stage was transformed and the costumes amazing. We haven't been to too many shows and events after supper mainly because it would mean more drinks and we would have had enough by then. Rick had four beers by the pool and had to keep popping out during the show and dinner.

Tuesday 7 March

We sailed up to Willis Island, located just beyond the Great Barrier Reef, the only inhabited island of the Coral Sea cluster. It's tiny but beautifully formed and mostly a home to nesting birds and turtles. In 1921 the Australian Bureau of Meteorology set up a station there to gain more insight on cyclonic patterns in the region. There are three or four residents living there usually for six months at a time. Twice a day they set off a meteorological balloon which we witnessed this morning except we didn't. We were looking at the wrong thing expecting the dome on top of the building to take off. They are set off at the same time all over the world.



Got chatting to a nice lady in the library who tested positive at the cruise changeover. She was confined to her cabin for 5 days so a bit disappointed. Celebrity gave her full internet access and were very attentive, but unfortunately her husband also tested positive a few days ago. I was telling her how there wasn't any gluten free food for me on the fourteen hour flight out and despite my best efforts I wasn't confident there would be any on the way back. She doesn't think she will eat anything for at least two weeks when she gets back as she had the most embarrassing thing happen on her flight out, she had to ask for an extension to her seatbelt which meant she couldn't put her table down - that was before the cruise!

It was once again a hot day; people were flat out in the full sun all day but we keep ourselves under cover. Danny Elliot was the evening star, he played a variety of instruments including the bagpipes. He played an Irish jig on a tin whistle and then added another one, playing two at the same time. We lost count of how many instruments he used and he could also sing.

Wednesday 8 March

We are learning some Australian words, eskies, that means cold box. Waltzing Matilda has loads of local words making the song have a totally different meaning to what I thought.

Swagman – a hobo, an itinerant worker, who travelled from place to place in search of work. A swagman was usually extremely poor and carried all his belongings wrapped up in a blanket .

Billabong – a waterhole or pond. It is an aboriginal word meaning little or no water.

Coolibah Tree – a eucalyptus tree that usually grows near water. Derived from the aboriginal word *gulabaa*.

Billy – a tin can with a wire handle used to boil water.

Jumbuck – a sheep. It is derived from the two words **jumping buck**.

Waltz – means to travel from place to place. It originated from the German phrase "Auf der Walz" (roughly translated as "on the road").

Matilda –to carry one's belongings in a blanket slung over his shoulder.

Tucker Bag – a bag for storing food (tucker). It was usually an old sugar or flour sack.

Squatter – a wealthy landowner, a rancher.

Thoroughbred – An expensive pedigreed horse. The Mercedes Benz equivalent of its day.

Trooper – a policeman, a mounted militia-man.

It's very hot about 28, so it's sitting in the shade by the pool again enjoying the music and activities.

Update on my leg, no itching but bleeds very easily and once it starts it's difficult to stop. Scaring has faded a little but the black bruising makes it look terrible.

In Airlie the other day we had quite a chat with one of the entertainers called Chantelle Delaney. She was on for the first time tonight. I googled her and she is an internationally acclaimed singer, songwriter and guitarist. She did have a good voice but she lacked the maturity and flow of some of the other performers.



It was International Women's Day and the Captain said Celebrity are proud that 32% of their staff are women, with that, women from every department paraded through the theatre and onto the stage. We dined in the "Tuscan Grille", one of the very few disappointing meals. Captain Leo was busy last night as after the shows he hosted a hilarious adult "Would I Lie To You". I feel very, very fat.

Thursday 9 March

Our last full day on the ship and it's cooler and overcast but we were still able to relax by the pool. Lots of organising to do as we have to put our cases outside our door before 10pm. Last visit to the Martini Bar where we at last met a great couple from Pennsylvania, she's just retired and he's a lawyer. We exchanged email addresses as we can meet up if they are in Southampton and they said to get in touch if we are in New York. There was quite a Trump discussion, a lot of people initially thought Trump was a breath of fresh air. Fox News embraced him to help their falling ratings but even they are not so supporting now. They said everyone is sick to death of Harry and Megan. Then chatted and lip read to a lovely Irish couple from Donegal, she looked 20 years younger than him and he watches cricket all day. Tonight's show was a Broadway tribute with Rietta Austin, Chantelle Delaney and the beautiful voice of Will Martin. Said goodbye and gave tips to Juan (\$50 Bern and waiter \$20 each and Wendy our room attendant \$60). Gratuities were included with our package but it's good to show your appreciation to those you have been in most contact with. Our final Martini in the Sunset Bar.

Friday 10 March

Disembarking was easy but it was chaos finding our airport transport. I noticed that my bracelet was missing so Rick rushed back through the crowds to report it as lost property, finding it seemed impossible. However, something amazing happened, it appeared on the top of one of the suitcases. We had searched all around our immediate area and I had wheeled both cases quite some way over rough ground. By then we had to give up on the airport shuttle and took a taxi from a quieter area near the Marriott.



Lorne and Bea were pleased to see us and 7.5 year old Evie had taken the day off school. We set off on a long bush walk to an elevated viewpoint where Lorne sometimes flies radio controlled aircraft. Evie screamed when we saw a dead snake on the path. She did very well because it was a long, hot walk, probably the furthest she has ever walked. Great exercise for us. Lunch was at the pub where Homer works, he joined us during his lunch break. It was quite an emotional farewell and they hope to visit us all next time.



Lorne ordered us a Uber for the airport, it only took about 5 minutes to arrive. Fourteen hour flight with Qatar to Doha followed by a seven hour BA flight to Heathrow. The rattily BA Boeing 777 plane was about twenty years old, everything worn and hardly any screens working. Qatar planes were all modern with charging points and a huge range of entertainment.

Lots of bed moving going on at home as Jen, Hayden, Lydia, Forest and Meadow now moving back to their house on 23 March. They've been with us for six months while their house is being remodelled. We are going to miss them.

We have really enjoyed this cruise, the food and entertainment have been excellent. The weather has been kind to us, lots of hot days, only three days with rain and best of all calm seas throughout. The icing on the cake has been catching up with Lorne and Homer and meeting Bea and Evie for the first time.

