

**January 2016**  
**Tour Dublin, Ireland and Southampton, England**  
**January 1 - January 9, 2016**

**Cruise Southampton, England – Fort Lauderdale, Florida**  
**Queen Mary 2**  
**January 10 – January 20, 2016**

**Itinerary**

12/30/15 Boise to Salt Lake Delta #1332 dep 1:08pm  
Super 8 Hotel Airport, Salt Lake

12/31/15 Salt Lake to Chicago Delta #952 dep 8:35am arr 12:49pm  
Chicago to Paris, France Delta #122 dep 5:05pm arr 8:25am

01/01/16 Paris to Dublin, Ireland Delta #8577mdep 10:15am arr 11:15am  
Ashling Hotel, Dublin-Five nights

01/06/16 Dublin to Southampton Flybe #386 dep 4:35pm arr 5:55pm  
Premier Inn West Quay, Southampton-4 nights

01/10/16 Board Queen Mary 2 dep 5:00pm

01/11/16 At Sea formal night

01/12/16 At Sea formal night

01/13/16 At Sea

01/14/16 At Sea

01/15/16 At Sea formal night

01/16/16 At Sea

01/17/16 New York Brooklyn Terminal arr morning dep evening

01/18/16 At Sea formal night

01/19/16 At Sea formal night

01/20/16 Debarb Fort Lauderdale, Florida arr morning  
Pickup Fox rental car at Miami airport  
Tour Florida Keys. Blackfin Resort/Marina, Marathon, Fl

01/21/16	Tour the Keys. Choice Hotel, Florida City, Fl		
01/22/16	Tour Everglades. Runway Inn Miami Airport		
01/23/16	Board Celebrity Reflection in Miami	dep 4:00pm	
01/24/16	At Sea		
01/25/16	San Juan, Puerto Rico	arr 3:30pm	dep 11:00pm
01/26/16	Philipsburg, St. Maarten	arr 9:00am	dep 6:00pm
01/27/16	Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas	arr 8:00am	dep 5:00pm
01/28/16	At Sea		
01/29/16	At Sea		
01/30/16	Debark Miami, Florida		
	Overnight at Runway Inn Miami Airport		
01/31/16	New York to Salt Lake Delta # 431	dep 11:01am	arr 2:25pm
	Salt Lake to Boise Delta # 4569	dep 4:55pm	arr 6:13pm

## Journey Begins

### Tuesday December 29, 2016

Drove to Boise on a snowy day to stay with Brian and Tina and leave the car. The next afternoon caught a Delta flight to Salt Lake. Stayed overnight for an early flight to Chicago. Then to Paris and on to Dublin, Ireland, arriving New Years Day.

Probably wondering why that routing. It yielded a fare that was mostly covered by the \$800 travel voucher we each received last February for giving up our seats and going on a later flight from Salt Lake to Long Beach. The fare was about one third the fare from Salt Lake to London, so I booked it. We will spend 5 days in Dublin and 4 days in Southampton before catching the Queen Mary 2. It was looking like a bad decision to go through Chicago as a bad winter snow storm was causing flight cancellations. However, it cleared before our flight, and we made it in and out of Chicago in fine shape. We had visions of being stranded for a few days.

### December 30

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The Chicago O'Hare airport was a challenge arriving on a domestic flight for a connection in the international terminal. We decided ahead of time to play the old age game, and requested wheelchair assistance for Larue. A nice guy met us as we deplaned in terminal 2, and off we went.

Walked fast for about a mile on the concourse . Then up and down two elevators and got on a tram. Went a long ways to terminal 5, the international terminal. Got to security and it was five abreast with long lines. However, the whee chair line was empty and we went straight through. I was headed through the security check with my shoes on and the TSA guy asked me my age. I stammered and stuttered trying to think. Larue said something like 79. I assume he thought I was about 55 (a joke amongst me, and Marc, my Twin Falls walking buddy).

The whole thing took one hour. On a close connection we would not have made it on our own, not knowing where to go. Got to the gate and decided to get on my laptop and check the seating for our flight to Paris to see if it was still about half full in the coach section. To my surprise it was completely full (due to the travel delays and weather). Then I saw I was moved to 1<sup>st</sup> class. Checked on Larue's seat and she was still in coach. This is not going to be good. I went up to the counter and told the lady, "this is not going to fly with my wife". I figured I would go back to my old seat. The gate attendant grinned and said she would fix it. I resigned myself to going back in the no class section with Larue.

She handed me boarding passes for both of us side by side in 1<sup>st</sup> class (Delta 1). All four of the gate attendants were watching and grinning when I showed Larue our seat assignments. We did waves and high fives all around. It is interesting that a couple of days earlier I checked the 1<sup>st</sup> class fare for the Chicago to Paris leg. It was \$9,300 per person for one way. I guess the rich will pay it.

I was expecting larger seats, but it was a whole new world. The seats and enclosed space is totally redesigned and an engineering marvel. The configuration was a seat along the windows with wide aisles and two seats in the middle. We were side by side in the middle. It was like stepping into an airplane cockpit. There was a high bulkhead in front of us with tv screens and 18 inch wide consoles for arm rests. The arm rests had a row of red illuminated buttons

for controlling the seat position. You only see the top of peoples head that are offset in front of you. When you recline the seat moves you down in a rolling motion with you moving forward. You can raise a foot rest for comfort . The result is nobody reclines back into your space. The push of a button and your body moves down and your feet extend under the console in front. Another button was the bed option. It moved you down in one motion until you had a flat bed. I found that position bothered me after a while. My feet up in that enclosed confined space got claustrophobic. So, I used the separate buttons to adjust my recline to about 60% and extend the foot rest to my liking. There was also a button to turn on the massage feature. We also had a nice duvet type comforter and a big pillow. If you wanted you could be totally comfortable for sleeping. The only trouble is that I cannot sleep on airplanes. We also got a nice toilet kit in a nice case for freshening up.

Before taking off and later before dinner it was wine, champagne, or cocktails. The dinner menu was huge. It was several pages in both English and French with all the choices. For a starter it was Cherry Wood Smoked Salmon with apple-fennel wasabi mousse and crostini, and a Signature Cocktail with Bombay Sapphire Gin with cranberry apple juice and splash of ginger ale (was too sweet for me so went back to the straight stuff). The "Appetizers" were Winter Salad Greens with Grapefruit and Lemon vinaigrette, and Stout Beer Onion Soup..The "Main Course" was a choice of Pan Seared Ribeye Fillet on a cedar plank, or Duo of Chicken: St. Tropez Chicken Rolade and Confit Chicken Leg, or Olive Oil Poached Alaskan Halibut, or Fresh Black Truffle and Potato Ravioli. All during dinner they came through with a selection of several red and white wines. For dessert it was Vanilla Ice Cream Sunday, Lava Cake, Selection of Fine Cheeses.or all of them if you wanted. When we approached Paris in the morning it was a Skybreak Basket, or French Onion Quiche and Honey Almond Granola Cereal. What a life. I wonder if the Queen Mary 2 can match all of that. What a way to travel.

I was worried about our two hour connection in Paris, since the airport is so large. A nice little French lady met us with a wheel chair as we deplaned, and off we went. She kept looking back to see if I was keeping up, and I was right behind her. It was a lot of turns and corridors,. She cut through to the head of line at security. Cruised right through in about 30 minutes total.

When she left us I said “au revoir” in my best French. She said, “oh nice”, and did the cheek to cheek thing on both sides with us. Our seat assignments were not together on the connecting flight to Dublin. Delta said to check with the gate person as it was City Jet (a budget British commuter line), and they could not change them. We waited and waited, and no gate person came to the counter. Then all of a sudden the boarding process began. We jumped up and joined in. We asked the flight attendant if we could get seats together, and she moved people around to accommodate us. They were so nice.

## **January 1 Dublin**

The fog cleared over the English channel, and we flew across the southern tip of England enjoying the view. Also, the angry looking Atlantic sea that we will be sailing across.

Approaching Ireland the wind whipped up, and we were going up and down. It was a scary landing, but a relief to get on the ground. Another 5 minutes and there would have been a lot of sick people. We were relieved to see that our luggage arrived. LaRue's was one of the last to hit the belt, and that caused some consternation.

The taxi ride to the Ashling Hotel was another experience! It is about 7 miles, and we were going nicely on the motorway with our elderly driver talking non stop. He suddenly exits onto surface roads. I knew we were going the slow route while the meter is ticking. He said we would go through Phoenix Park (the largest city park in Europe). Our hotel was close to the park, and maybe it was ok. He said he grew up playing in the park and knew every nook and cranny. We soon detoured because of a marathon. He suddenly made a right turn, and a car was coming head on. We were going the wrong way on a narrow one-way street. He swerved up over the curb onto the grass. We continued until he could get turned around. It is a wonder the front tire did not blow when he hit the curb. We got to the hotel, and he rounded the fare down to 40 euros (somewhere around \$41). The normal fare should have been about 30 euros. We were just glad to get out of there in one piece!

It was only about noon and our room was not ready, being New Years Day. We went into the lobby bar where they also have pub food, and had some soup. Larue had a creamy seafood chowder that was so thick you could walk on it, and I had a creamed broccoli. The bread was a thick country bread that weighed about a pound a slice!

The pub food was good and later we got checked in. After an hour nap we regrouped and had dinner in the bar that evening. Larue had fish and chips. The fish was so big we could have shared. I had a grilled cheddar, baked ham, tomato, and onion sandwich. Great food at a reasonable price (for Dublin) at 15 euros each. Really happy with the hotel. A quiet area with only the tram going by in front, a train station across the river bridge about 3 blocks away, and the Guinness Brewery property about another 3 blocks. The busy city center action and the Temple Bar hot spot is a little over a mile away along the river Liffey. A great location to spend a few days.

### **Saturday, January 2. Dublin**

Nice day with sunshine, which is unusual for Dublin. Did the Hop off Hop on bus. Had our first pints of Guinness at the vintage 1844 Ryan's pub about a block from the hotel. The Guinness brewery is about 6-8 blocks away across the river Liffey from us. Hard to beat. We liked Ryan's pub, so went back for dinner. I had fish and chips. LaRue had the beef pot pie.

### **Sunday, January 3. Dublin**

Nice day with sunshine at times. Was planning on an all day tour to the south on Sunday, but decided to sleep in and stay in town. Then utilize the Hop on Hop off bus again. It was a bargain as we got the second day option for only 3 more Euros each. Toured the Jameson Distillery with tasting and the Guinness Warehouse with tasting. A nice laid back day.

We were getting our ticket at Jameson's and the cashier asked where we were from, Upon hearing Idaho, he came back with, "O yes, Boise State"! While waiting for our tour time at Jamesons. we went into their Third Still Restaurant and had creamy white onion and potato soup with that heavy bread. It was a huge bowl and very good. We have noticed the tourists are all young people. Only a few middle aged people, so we feel kind of out of place.

### **Monday, January 4. Dublin**

The tours we wanted to schedule are long 12 hour days. We decided to stay in town and ride the bus again. Weather was good with some sunshine at times. The trouble is being a Monday all of the museums were closed. Spent time downtown in the Temple Bar area. This area was derelict slums, until the 80's, when it was resurrected as a tourist hot spot. It is now narrow street walking paths with pubs, restaurants, night life, and shops. We got there about 1pm and the place was hopping with live music in the pubs. It was like Bourbon Street in New Orleans. Found an off street alley authentic Irish food place, called O'sheas for lunch. Larue had Irish stew with lamb, and I had fish and chips(again). Bought a couple of souvenirs and got out of there. Ended up booking a shorter tour for Tuesday out in the mountains and countryside.

The whole downtown city center is a mass of people going everywhere. Would not want to be here during the height of the tourist season.

Had dinner at a neighboring pub called Nancy Hands. Larue had the "daily joint" which was sliced turkey, sliced ham, mashed potatoes, dressing, veggies, and a light brown gravy. I went for the Nancy burger which was gigantic with fries. The fries are always enough for three people. It was a nice old pub. The food was ample and good.

### **Tuesday, January 5. Dublin**

Got up with difficulty at 6:30am to catch our all day tour. Went to our meeting point downtown by taxi. In our anxiety over travel times, and the morning

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commute traffic we were 1 hour early. Taxis and city buses have a special lane, so we bypassed the gridlock.

Light rain as we departed the city, and headed south and west to the Wicklow mountains. Our excellent tour guide, Richard, said they refer to light rain as “soft weather”. We told him later that we had lived in Oregon, and they called light rain “Oregon Dry Rain”. He liked it.

The Wicklow mountains are the highest in Ireland, and are a top spot for tourism. Richard spoke clearly, and was understandable. He was an Irish history authority. He gave running commentary on the revolutions, dissent, wars, unemployment, and famine due to a potato blight disease from South America . It destroyed their potato crops. So, a large exodus of people left for the US and Canada in the 20's and 30's. Ireland has experienced a boom since joining the European Union in the 80's, but the population is still millions away from the old population levels. He said, “you just got a 1,000 years of Irish history in 30 minutes“

We traveled through the country, bogs, farm land, and some lakes for a couple of hours, gradually gaining elevation. It is interesting to know that the Guinness brewery gets their water from these mountains.

The bus took up the whole lane on narrow winding roads. Our driver, Paddy, grew up in the area and did a beautiful job. After a couple of hours we arrived in Glendalough (which in Gaelic means glen of 2 lakes). It is the site of a 600AD monastic settlement which is now ruins.

Very interesting walking tour. Then we repaired to a nice hotel coffee shop for coffee and muffins straight out of the oven.

Back on the bus and continued on up the pass to the summit, which was a whopping 700 ft elevation! It did seem alpine and very scenic. We passed through a small village with a pub, that is the highest elevation pub in Ireland. According to Richard a pint of Guinness at that elevation is equal to two pints at sea level! Oh well, they all believed it.

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Continued down the mountain to a small town named Hollywood. It even had a sign on the hill, the same as LA. According to Richard, a young guy left in the 1800's and ended up in California. Thus the LA Hollywood sign. He went on to become the governor of Montana and later drowned in the Missouri river. After Hollywood we went to Kilkenny. It is city of 24,000 that was founded in the medieval times. It can be called a city because it has a cathedral, according to Richard. It also has a huge castle. When we drove in Richard said you know you have arrived in a medieval city because McDonalds is on your right.

We have seen lots of McDonalds and Burger Kings, and they are huge facilities.

Visited the oldest pub in Ireland established in 1582. The name was, "the Hole in the Wall. It had 4 stools and the original cedar plank bar. From there it was a 2 hour bus ride back into Dublin arriving about 6pm. It was raining hard when we got back.

Interesting observation while in Dublin is that we saw no dogs. I did see a service dog on my last morning walk and that is all. We saw a total of 2 dogs on the country and mountain tour. Saw a lot of sheep, but not many cows. The big white sheep grazing in the green pastures made a pretty picture.

Some things I forgot about. One of the first things I noticed was the abundance of men's barber shops, a convenience that is disappearing at home. Most of them were advertising, "hot towel shaves". A special was a haircut and shave for 30 euros, which is about \$33.

Also, the Wicklow mountains that we visited is a popular set for movies. Due to its similarity to Norway the movie Braveheart was filmed there, along with a lot of well known movies.

### **Wednesday, January 6. Dublin/Southampton**

Nice day in Dublin.

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Packed up and caught a cab to the airport after having lunch at the hotel. We loved the Ashling Hotel stay and would stay there again.

The cab ride was 25 euros compared to the 40 euro tourist ride when we arrived. The airport and security was a bit of a hassle. Fly be Air charged us \$123 to check two bags. The fare for both of us was only \$160! Burns you up, but you gotta go with the flow if you gotta go.

It was a short flight of 1 hour on a Dash 8 turboprop that was not bad. They charged the equivalent of \$2 for a soft drink.

Nice little airport in Southampton. Caught a cab and got to our hotel, the Premier Inn, West Quay. It is near the docks and cruise ships.

A lot of turns and roundabouts getting to the hotel. It would be a nightmare on your own in a rental car. Taxi fare was 20 pounds or about \$30 for 7 or 8 miles. He could not run up the fare on us as the dispatcher told us what the fare would be.

We are next door to Carnival Corporation World Headquarters. The hotel is rather spartan, but very clean and modern Euro style. It will be fine, and the rate is decent. Comments and ratings on Trip Advisor were all good.

It was getting late, so we ate in the hotel restaurant. Can you believe we both had fish and chips! Instead of the traditional smashed peas we ordered whole garden peas and no fries (chips). Getting tired of fries.

### **Thursday, January 7. Southampton**

Went across the street to a huge new mall that is 3 levels, and extremely modern. Across from it on our side is a huge new Ikea store.

Larue bought gloves in the Spencer and Marx department store, and we started looking for a place to have lunch. Would not know you are in Europe for all the American fast food joints. Finally decided on Ed's Diner, which is a 50's style US

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diner with rock and roll music, and typically American. Had rather bad hamburgers, onion rings, cole slaw, fries, and luke warm bottles of coke for about \$45. What a deal.

Went back to the hotel and met up with Marianne from London, who we met on the South Pacific cruise last February. She was delivering baggage to the cruise ship she will meet in Chile in a couple of months. She will meet the ship, and continue on for 80+ days around the world. We were like old friends, and had a great visit.

Had dinner in the hotel pub as the hotel restaurant had an hour waitlist, and we did not want to go out walking in the rain. I had a loaded pizza and Larue had vegetarian lasagna. All in all not too bad.

### **Friday, January 8. Southampton**

Was planning on Stonehenge today. The only package tours are for cruise ship passengers with transfers to or from London Heathrow airport. To hire a 4 passenger (minimum) vehicle the cost is \$450, and the distance is only 35 miles. Looked at a taxi for \$200, and a combination of train and shuttle bus to the visitor center. It was about the same. With the rain and wind we bagged it.

Rain comes and goes. While we brought two umbrellas, we forget to take them, and get rained on.

Spent time in the old town walking on the Queen Elizabeth II Mile walkway. The Mile is a pedestrian mall with shopping, pubs, and restaurants. Had lunch at an Italian restaurant called Bella Italia. Both had salad and a pasta dish.

Little story here in that the only draft beer was Becks. I swore off Becks in 1955. I arrived on a troop ship in Southampton in September 1955. We were transported to the nearby RAF Shaftsbury base. We had been cooped up on the troop ship across the stormy north Atlantic for many days, and were quite thirsty. We went to the club and the only beer they had was Becks. We were grossly

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over served. It was about 2 times the alcohol content that we were accustomed to.

We found it ironic that this area had been bombed heavily during the war by the Germans. Now they only serve Becks, a German beer. I do not think I drank another Becks until today. Was good though. We had a basic lunch special for a total of about \$45. More expensive than we are accustomed to, but that is the way it is.

After lunch we found the Titanic Museum and really enjoyed it. Hard to believe the Titanic was built in Belfast, came to Southampton for provisioning and passengers, then hit the iceberg, and sank on its way to New York. It almost had an accident docking in Southampton as it created such a prop wash that the mooring lines broke on the liner United States. The two ships were about to collide. Only quick action by tugs, and the Captain saved the day. Maybe the ship was doomed for failure.

Decided to eat dinner again in the hotel restaurant as it is as good as any, and you don't have to go out in the cold wind and rain. It is normally packed and hard to get in, but it was about empty. Being Friday night the business people have checked out, and cruise ship activity is light for Saturday. Our waiter said Saturday night is busy again, as the three Cunard Queen ships depart on Sunday.

We decided to go with appetizers for dinner. Had potato, white onion, and leek soup with bread sticks. We also had small sides of tempura prawns, green salad, chicken wings, cole slaw, and onion rings. It hit the spot.

With a slow night our waiter was quite friendly and spent time visiting. When learning that we would end up in Florida he had a story. He previously worked for Delta airlines and a customer was booking to go to Naples, so he assumed Naples, Italy. The problem was the customer meant Naples, Florida! Maybe that is why he is a waiter now. That brought to mind when we were checking in for our flight in Boise. One of the gate agents said "Dub, oh Dubai". We in a panic said, "no, Dublin". Wonder if he did that on purpose.

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## **Saturday, January 9. Southampton**

Rain on and off rain today. Not planning on doing too much, and get ready for tomorrow's departure.

I have had a dry hacking cough for the last two days, and sweating it out as to whether it will get worse. Lots of vitamin C packets and those zinc thingeys that kind of destroy your taste buds. One thing you do not like is to be coughing at the cruise ship table. It panics everyone. Or the worst case scenario is they deny you boarding if you have a fever. Today, however, it looks like it is going away.

Went over to the mall and looked around. Went on through the mall to the mile walk. Quite a mob out on Saturday despite the weather. The pubs had people standing out on the sidewalk in the rain. Could hardly walk. Had lunch in a nice little Italian place, bought some "supplies" for the cruise, and headed home. Happy to be out of the congestion and weather.

Missing out on the football playoffs today. Will get the scores in the morning on the internet. We have the World Championship Dart Tournament on TV all day long. They played a video (that went viral) of a master and his dog watching the play on TV. When a player threw his dart the dog would tear around to the room behind the TV to retrieve the dart!

We board the ship tomorrow on Sunday, and our boarding time is 1pm. I see we have been upgraded from deck 11 category B balcony cabin to deck 12 category A1 club balcony. Do not know what that means, but hope it is larger.

Have a taxi reserved for 12 noon, as that is checkout time. It is only one mile. The reservation confirmation says the fare is 8 pounds which is about \$12.

Will get this sent off this Sunday morning while we still have free wifi. The ship wifi is quite expensive, so probably will just do an update a couple of times during the cruise.

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The following is a notice about the Queen Mary departure from Southampton:

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*Port of Southampton - Firework Displays Eastern Docks 10th January 2016*

*Notice is hereby given that on Sunday 10th January 2016, 3 firework displays will take place in the vicinity of the Eastern Docks, Port of Southampton, to mark the departure of 'Queen Mary 2', 'Queen Victoria' and 'Queen Elizabeth' on world cruises.*

*The firework displays will take place at approximately 1815, 1825 and 1835 GMT, from the barge, which will be positioned south east of Dock Head and outside the main channel in the vicinity of Moorhead Buoy.*

*Each display will last for approximately 4.5 minutes and will be fired as each ship passes Dock Head, so that the finale takes place as the ship passes the barge.*

## **Sunday, January 10 Embarkation**

Arrived at the ship a little after noon. The check in was a little slow but very structured, and orderly. It took about 2 hours to get on the ship.

We were upgraded to a Club Balcony. The cabin is larger by about 2 feet in width, and maybe a couple of feet longer in depth. It has a nice big balcony.

The ship is large at 1132 feet long, 131 feet wide, only 51,400 tons, and capacity is 2600 passengers with 1230 crew. Most cruise ships this size have another thousand passengers. It has 4 azipod electric motors, each with a large prop, hanging off the bottom of the ship. Each weigh as much as a 747. There are 4 bow thrusters, and the ship can pivot on its center axis. It generates 150,000 horsepower. From the seas that we have seen this ship is very capable and comfortable.

I like the layout. LaRue does not like the fact that sometimes you can't get there from here. We get lost, and are constantly checking the map. The design is more old school. The new ships are more straight through with shopping malls to get you to stop.

To our surprise we had 2 bottles of champagne and strawberries waiting for us.

The interesting thing is we were booked for late dining in the Britannia dining room. Now we go to the smaller Club Britannia dining room with an assigned table. We can dine anytime between 6 and 9pm, so that is nice.

Our bags were already in our room when we got there.

We dropped off our carry ons, and went to the Lido deck Kings Court buffet for lunch. Much different as it is broken up into smaller rooms. We enter from the front of the ship. Most of the people enter from the middle, and back of the ship. They stop before going too far back. Our buffet area was mostly deserted. It is normally an absolute zoo on departure day.

The Queen Mary 2 (QM2) is a step above what we have seen on other ships. It is sophisticated elegance with subdued colors, nice paneling, and none of the usual cruise ship glitz, and bright colors,

The Captain himself did the announcement of the life boat drill rather than relegate it to an underling.

I like the layout but LaRue does not like the fact that sometimes you can't get there from here, is lost, and constantly checking the map. The design is old school . The new ships are more straight through with shopping malls to get you to stop.

Our departure was almost 2 hours late so that messed up the timing of the 3 queens departing at the same time. The Elizabeth pulled out at 5pm and gave us some blasts on the horn as it passed behind us. The QM2 answered back with 2 long blasts. Then the Victoria pulled out about an hour later with horn blasts as it passed behind us, and the QM2 answered back. We got underway about an

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hour later and we had quite a fireworks show. The fireworks barge was just off the port side. Our cabin looked down on it, so we had a close encounter. It was quite a display for about 5 minutes, and as nice as we have ever seen.

We headed down to dinner about 7:30pm wondering how this was going to work with an assigned table and anytime dining.

The dining room was two small rooms with no more than 15 tables in each. The atmosphere was quiet and elegant. Our table was for 6, as we requested. Dick and Denise, from the Maine coast were almost finished, and ordering dessert. They are late 60's and we hit it off with them. Being out of phase is kind of awkward, but they wanted to visit and hung around.

Then an English lady named Jane arrived about 7:45. She is quiet and soft spoken (like Marianne on the last cruise). Then the final guy arrived at 8pm who is about 80 or more, and named Tony. Right off he ordered a gin on the rocks "with no garbage", and proceeded to explain what it is. He is the replacement for George that we had on the last cruise. He was born in England, but lived 37 years in Chicago, and now is retired in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Tony had a ring on each hand that was blinding. I don't know much about diamonds, but I would say they were at least 5 carats each. He is a take charge assertive guy, and a know it all about cruising (hard to have more than one expert at the same table). I see some conflicts coming up already. He got on the ship before Christmas, and goes where the ship goes. He does it every year. Said he has gone around South America via Cape Horn five times. He proceeded to say that dining works best if all arrive around the same time, and eat together. He suggested 8pm while the rest wanted somewhat earlier. Guess what? The time will be 8pm. We shall see if that holds up.

The menu was huge and consisted of 3 different menus. The first was the healthy spa selection (blah selection to me). The second was the regular dining room menu. The third was a special offering for the Club dining room. The menu items are in very understandable plain English, unlike our last cruise with Cunard. We both had an excellent prawn cocktail, and I had the grilled sirloin steak to find out if the beef will be to my liking (it fell short being British beef), and

then had crème brulee for dessert. LaRue had a salad, then filet of sole, and crème brulee.

The evening main entertainment was offered only once before our dinner, so we missed it, and retired fairly early.

## **Monday, January 11. At Sea**

Clocks went back one hour with four more before reaching New York. The sea is rough this morning, so I took a dramamine just in case. It is a steely grey day with 6-8 foot whitecaps, and isolated storms in the area. Just the kind of day described in all of the books I have been reading about the German U-boats that operated in the north Atlantic in ww2.

Went to breakfast and I had a melon plate, and eggs benedict. LaRue had a melon plate, poached eggs, English bacon, grilled tomato, and toast. Pretty much stuff we got used to on Queen Victoria last year.

After breakfast, we explored the ship. It pays to get oriented well, as some decks do not go all the way though. At times you can't get there without going up or down to the next deck. We found the lecture theater, and attended a lecture on the ocean floor, ocean volcanoes, and earthquakes by a Woods Hole lady scientist. Very good talk, but I was fighting sleep. My dry cough is dragging me down, so spent the afternoon resting.

Formal night tonight, and the Captain's party, that is by invitation only, before dinner. Turned on the shower and did not get hot water. Being used to the way controls operate on ships I went through all the appropriate maneuvers, and still cold water. Thinking I was not doing it right I checked for hot water in the sink, which has the standard one handle valve, and still only cold water. We called the steward and he came in a little while. He turned on the valve, and instant hot water in the sink and shower! He had to have had something done to pull that off!

Decided to go the Captain's reception late. I had taken C-pack earlier, and would not be imbibing. Did not plan to go through the "meet the Captain door", but got the wrong door and there he was. Usually someone ushers you through very quickly with a picture taken on the fly. We presented our invitation, and were presented to the Captain. He proceeded to chat, and get us all posed for the photo. He wanted to know about Idaho, and if we were near the coast, as he has not been to Idaho. He was rather young looking, and Larue made some comment about it. He replied, "I am much older than I appear". Very impressive person that enjoys his role.

The reception was in the Queen's room that is sheer elegance, and enough seating for everyone. Enough waiters to get around often with wine, champagne, orange juice, and finger foods, so that you did not have to go looking for it. The orange juice was kind of weak though. The Captain, Christopher Wells, gave a talk. He can really spread it on, and is quite witty. Informed us we are not on a cruise. We are on an ocean going liner on a transatlantic crossing. The proper term on this leg to New York is "a crossing".

We have 34 different nationalities as passengers, and something like 57 different nationalities of crew members. He does like to talk.

After the reception was over we decided to go to our dining room early, and have an appetizer until everyone arrives. Jane was there and almost through dinner as she was not happy about the 8pm time. She was quite nice, and we had a good chat. She was going to change tables, but came anyway. We had really nice prawn cocktails while we waited. Denise arrived without Dick, as he was under the weather. She said she left him with two martinis and Sudafed to nurse himself. She looks prim and proper, and is sort of a character. Tony arrived under a full head of steam. I don't know if he had a snoot full, or if it was just the ship lurching him around.

I had cream of mushroom soup for another appetizer. Then had shrimp provencal and jasmine rice on the Club menu. LaRue had a beet salad and a different shrimp offering off the regular menu. Both were excellent. LaRue mentioned the Captain seemed to enjoy speaking, and got an instant lecture from Tony. He rose up in his chair and leaned over the table, and said in his

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most sophisticated British accent, “my dear - if you have heard the Captain speak as many times as I have heard him, you would realize he is a windbag”. Thought that was our drama for the evening, but we got another lecture about the “United States should be raising sheep, and not cattle”.

The dessert menu had a flambé of apricots, orange flavoring, different liquors, vanilla ice cream, and a drizzle of Bing cherry juice all prepared table side. Tony, me (at his insistence), and Denise had it. It was quite a production at table side. A waiter stood by with a fire extinguisher. LaRue had crème brûlée, as usual. I thought cruise lines do not allow open flames on board, but not on the Mary.

We were shot after dinner, so skipped the late show. It was a wild walk the length of the ship to get back to the cabin.

## **Tuesday, January 12. At Sea**

Clocks went back one hour again. The sea is fairly smooth this morning with rolling swells that the ship slices through very nicely. Overcast with rain squalls, but over all pretty nice for the Atlantic.

After coffee and a muffins in the cabin we went to the main dining room for breakfast. The main part is on deck 2 with another level on deck 3 looking down. The one on deck 3 then has three tiers of tables, so they can look down below. We walked into the one on deck 3 and got a table on the lower tier and we were the only people. Later, people arrived at four other tables.

During the noon announcement the Captain said we have 12,000 meters of water under us. Proceeding at 19 knots, and the outside temp was 8 degrees centigrade. Did not hear the wind velocity, but it is always big. He also said it is the anniversary of the QM2 maiden voyage 12 years ago. All useful information.

The location of our cabin is ideal, except for being high and forward where the ship moves the most in bad weather. The deck covers about a third of the ship's length, and is directly behind the bridge. LaRue was looking for a laundromat yesterday and went forward to the end of the corridor and turned right. She

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found a window looking into the bridge! It is not advertised and not many know about it. It is only 15 cabins forward of us, so it makes it easy to observe what is going on up there. Not much happening out here in the ocean, and just a couple of officers scanning forward, but it is interesting. The elevators are about ten or so cabins behind us. Beyond that is a huge covered sun deck with a big pool, lounge chairs, a bar, live music at times, games, and pool tables. Doors keep the sound from reaching us. It is all for the Club cabins on deck 12. Our luck continues.

Went to the main dining room for lunch. Requested a table for two because of my occasional cough. However, the table for two beside us was only a foot away. They were a nice British couple, and we had a good visit. We both had the grilled haddock that was excellent.

We decided to exit the side door beside us and saw the Club Britannia dining room where our assigned evening dining is. We saw activity inside, so went in to check it out. We thought it was only open for dinner. Our table is there for breakfast and lunch, all to our surprise. So, we have more options, and maybe an expanded menu for breakfast.

I have not felt up to walking outside in the weather and wind, but hopefully later today or in the morning.

Was able to get update 3 sent off as the internet was working quite well and it did not take long. Quiet afternoon with calm seas so the ride has been smooth.

Everyone was at the dinner table doing well. A few conflicts with Tony as he speaks slowly and low, and constantly gets talked over. This upsets him. In order to keep the peace I have to quiet everyone down so Tony can speak. Dick is retired Air Force. Then 18 years as a science teacher. He talks a lot. Jane does not offer anything other than her husband has passed away.

I elected to go for something different on the menu, which was baguettes with vegetables, shrimp, and some kind of tomato sauce. It was like ravioli with pureed veggie filling, thick tomato sauce, and shrimp. Three of the ravioli was enough, but the shrimp were good. Also had french onion soup, and a lemon

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mousse thing for dessert. LaRue had a salad, a combination appetizer thing of mussels, asparagus, and some other stuff, then the lemon mousse dessert. Service was really slow, and I was getting ticked off about it. Then we discovered why. Dick eats so slow that it takes him 30 minutes or more between courses. The waiters were waiting for everyone to finish the course before moving on. Denise finally got on him, so we could get to the dessert round.

The late show was a British singer and comedian act. Not too entertaining in our estimation, so departed early. The theater is lavish with the seating being velvet red couches with high backs rather than individual seats. Great view of the stage as it is huge and extends out into the seating area. We sat in the upper level and looked down on the entertainer. Had to time our exit so as not incur his wrath.

### **Wednesday, January 13. At Sea**

The third sea day. Clocks went back again 1 hour. Finally feel in synch with the time this morning. Very smooth sea and was able to get out on the panorama deck and walk. It was cold but no worse than walking on the canyon rim in the winter with the wind blowing. Surprised at the number of people out walking all bundled up in winter coats. No speed burners, and just normal walkers. Nice wide deck that goes around the ship. Kind of crazy that the deck lounge *chairs* were all out for use. They are the traditional wood with brass fittings, that look really classy.

Went to the Club dining room for breakfast. Were the only ones there, except for another table with two people. A few more drifted in later. LaRue had the traditional English breakfast, and I had poached eggs, hash, and English bacon. Have never had good hash on a cruise ship. Wanted to try it, and it was really good.

Went to a talk scheduled for 11am. Did not get there early enough, and no seats were available. So, we bagged it and strolled around the ship. Lots of really expensive shopping. LaRue was dragging, so went back to the cabin.

I went to the bridge viewing area for a while. Very boring for those guys just staring straight ahead in the middle of the Atlantic. There are 32 screens spread across their consoles for radars, and everything going on with the ship.

The Captain in his noon announcement said that this mornings sailing has been like Caribbean sailing, it has been so nice. Going to change this afternoon. We are now in the mid Atlantic. Have not seen another ship. I thought we would see some since we are on a major shipping route.

Now for a blast from the past when I came across on a troop ship in 1955, the General William O. Darby. About the third day we were told the Queen Mary would overtake us on the port side about 10pm. We were all up there. This caused the ship to list badly, and we were told to move back away from the rail. Then here came the Queen Mary with lights all a blaze. We could hear the music, and people talking and laughing. It passed us, and disappeared, leaving us to wallow along for several more days.

Never thought I would be on the Queen Mary (later version) some day.

Went to the Club dining room for lunch. Jane was at the table and only two other couples at other tables. LaRue had parsnip soup, salad, and calves liver. I had scotch broth soup, and lasagna. All quite good. We finished off with pistachio, mango, and sorbet ice cream along with lemon ginger tea that Jane introduced us to. Lots of tea drinkers on this ship. I cannot imagine how many teapots they have aboard.

Weather is changing drastically this afternoon with clouds down on the deck. Rain and whitecaps everywhere. Would take a nap but we have a talk at 3:30 by the Woods Hole scientist on the deep ocean floor that we want to attend. The speaker is one of the foremost scientists on the deep ocean floor, and has made many trips on the deep sea Alvin to study life and activity on the bottom.

Dinner was interesting. We decided to arrive at 7:30 to keep Jane company, as she prefers that time. Arrived and Tony was there, and seated next to Jane. It surprised us, with Tony being there so early. He explained that he forgot to set his watch back last night. Likely story. I think he planned it. He was in fine form,

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and really dapper in a powder blue coat, white shirt, a light green tie, and white slacks.

Dick and Denise did not show. Everything centered around Tony, and he turned on the charm for Jane. Surprised us when he asked Jane her age, then suddenly acted like he should not have done it. She did answer 74 (nice looking 74!) then turned the question back on him. He made us all guess. I was polite and said 80, then corrected it to 95 to zing him. He is 89 with a birthday tomorrow. We already knew Jane's birthday is tomorrow.

During dinner Tony made us all promise to arrive at 8pm for dinner tomorrow night. I think he has something planned and is kind of making a move on Jane. My mind is immediately thinking "this guy might be a professional scam artist". After dinner we had over an hour to kill before the late show with classical singers. We decided to return to the cabin and Jane walked with us through the ship, as her cabin is the second cabin forward from us. When we left the dining room Tony went a different direction. As we approached the elevators Tony caught up with us and said he would ride up also. Jane kind of blurted out, "and where are you going?" He said he would get off on 9. We continued on up to 12. His cabin should be on deck 12 also. Will see how this plays out at dinner tomorrow night.

Nothing to rave about dinner. I had ham and pea soup, filet of lemon sole, and a parfait dessert. LaRue had a pate, pork loin, and ice cream for dessert. We also had lemon ginger tea that is caffeine free, refreshing, and we enjoy it. Almost forgot the bottle of Italian pinot grigio. The wine list is very extensive with page after page grouped by the country and price. Starts at several hundreds of dollars down to prices that are very affordable for a luxury cruise ship. I have seen bottles as low as \$20. You can scan down to the price range most comfortable, and have many choices.

### **Thursday, January 14. At Sea**

Seas got really rough during the night, and still bouncing around fairly good this morning. Fog and rain when we got up, but the sun is shining through in places by noon. Just us at the table for breakfast. I had French toast and scrambled

eggs, and LaRue had waffles with blueberry compote. Scrambled eggs on cruise ships is always a gamble, and these were no exception. French toast was good, but LaRue's waffle was kind of like frozen toaster waffles.

The dining room is on deck 2 and the water looks very close. When there are waves they get right up by the windows. This morning we were slicing through huge swells and the wake and spray was going way up higher than the windows. I chose a seat looking away from the water.

After breakfast we went to the lecture theater for a talk by a New York professor that grew up making crossings with his parents in the late 50's, and early 60's. He traveled on all the grand old cruise liners. It was really interesting with his photos and memories.

Had a pub lunch at the Golden Lion Pub. Both had cod and chips with smashed peas and fries. Quiet, and a nice old pub atmosphere. Peas were awful.

After lunch we had 2:30 tickets to the planetarium show in the lecture theater. The theater has a huge dome over the seats that is a projection screen, and the seats recline. The projection is 360 degrees overhead and shows the stars and planets, and zooms you into outer space. A very nice production.

The Captain announced at noon that we are approaching the Outer Banks. At 10pm we will cross 200 miles north of where the Titanic hit the iceberg and sank. He said not to worry though. Modern iceberg tracking will keep us well clear of them. It is rare if you see one. I think it is the ones you don't see that are the problem.

Spent the rest of the afternoon trying to read, but mostly falling asleep.

Met everyone for dinner at 8pm as instructed by Tony. He was decked out in a maroon blazer, black bow tie, white shirt, and black slacks. He was all pumped up about the birthday occasion. He had a waiter bring French champagne (Veuves Cliquot) for all, and we toasted the birthdays. Nothing extraordinary for dinner. I had a chicken cordon blue type thing, and LaRue had filet of sole. Then after dinner a special cake appeared for Jane (by Tony's arrangement), and

everyone sang happy birthday. Then all of the waiters circled us and did it again. Tony kept insisting this was all for Jane, and not for his birthday. We know it was his birthday, as we heard the entertainment director announce it on his morning television show. While we were sitting there after dinner the lady at the next table came over and asked if she could sing for us. We agreed and she did some opera thing, that I knew nothing about, but she was good. Guess she likes to sing.

We departed after dinner and the last I heard was Jane asking Tony to go dancing. Surprised me to hear him decline. Do not know what took place as we headed out to kill time before the evening show. The show was the big production show for the trip and was singing and dancing with a slow tempo. I lasted about a half hour. Seas starting to act up as we went to bed.

### **Friday, January 15. At Sea**

Fifth day at sea. It was a rough ride during the night. Big swells that were spaced far enough apart where the ship didn't slice through them, but went up one side and down the other. The bottoming out produced some jolts and jerking sideways then started up for the next cycle. Being in bed was the best place to be.

Got up this morning, and while the sea is angry white caps, the ride is fairly good. It is gray steely overcast with storm cells around us. Went out for a walk and it was really tough. Cold nasty wind with a few snow crystals coming down. I did one lap. When I came around and headed into the wind on the port side I was afraid it was going to knock me down. It was a struggle to move forward against the wind. There were two couples out there trying it. I came in and walked on the inside for a while. No need to get blown overboard and make fish food.

Decided to try the lido deck buffet for breakfast this morning as a change of pace. Lots of stuff but all ordinary. After breakfast it took some searching, but we finally found the bookstore, and the library nestled in the bow of the ship. Lots of interesting stuff up in the bow like the history, pictures of the old Queen Mary crossings, and the photos of famous people making the crossing. No interesting lectures this morning so we lounged around. Both of us still have the cough,

which seems to be an upper respiratory thing, and kind of drags you down. Naps come easily.

Went to our table for lunch and Jane, Dick and Denise were there. Everyone looks older in the daylight and casual clothes. At first I thought other people were at our table. I had a white onion soup (different from any we have had), a good pork escalope with pasta, and then raspberry pannacotta. LaRue had the soup, green salad, medallions of turkey, and ice cream. Had a good visit and everyone split.

Back in the cabin and the wind is blowing like crazy. You can hear the waves crashing as they are thrown out from the ship. The ride is tolerable, so no complaints. Would not want to be on the flat bottom cruise ships built for fair weather cruising.

Another formal night tonight. That makes 4 out of 7 nights for the crossing, which to us is too many. Jane was already there and finishing up her dessert, as she was going to catch the early show. Tony wasn't wearing a tux or a suit, but a multi-colored striped blazer and bow tie. Think he likes to show off. We all had surf and turf, and some had escargot, but I went with the salad. LaRue did not care for the escargot so much. The surf and turf was ok, but the lobster was a little over done.

Tony was hard to get along with. He was challenging and arguing everything. I really felt bad for Dick when he was telling us a story about his father. Tony said "why are you talking about him? He is dead. Talk about something current that we are interested in". We were all a little stunned.

Then he went on asking Dick how he accepts free hearing aids from the VA when obviously he is affluent going on cruises and traveling. He also went on correcting Dick's use of English. Poor Dick was really getting exasperated. I spoke up and said "I think I agree with what the redneck Texan told you", which was addressed to Tony. That really got his attention, and he acted like he didn't know what I was talking about. The story behind this is that Tony told us early in the cruise that one time there was this tall lanky older Texan at his table. After a few meals together the Texan leaned over the table in a slow drawl and said,

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“why don’t y’all just go back to England”. It was hilarious the way Tony told it at the time with the perfect Texas drawl. Anyway, he didn’t like what I said, and started attacking me. I just responded with, “enough said, you told the story”. We will see if the dining coalition holds up the rest of the way.

The late show was the acclaimed pianist Tian Jiang who was added for this crossing. The hype says “He is young and dynamic“. The New York Times wrote: “Shining, crisp, energetic and colorfully illuminated”. I probably would not go that far, but he was good.

### **Saturday, January 16. At Sea**

Clocks went back one hour last night. Smooth seas during the night, and this morning as well. Fogged in and really wet outside. Looks like it is raining hard.

Had a quiet breakfast in the Club dining room with just a few other diners. It is peaceful without the activity and noise of the main dining room. I had my first omelet of ham, swiss cheese, and tomatoes, a Cumberland sausage, and a small hash brown patty. Could not finish it all. LaRue had a veggie egg white omelet. No lecture we want to attend this morning, so headed back to the cabin. Checked out the Commodore Club on the way back as it is forward and looks out under the bridge. Then up to our deck and visited the bridge viewing window. Visibility is very low. Two officers on watch were peering intently ahead. The radar showed a lot of blips out there. Stepped out on our balcony, and it is raining very hard. The balcony has seen little use on this trip, but is nice to have. We have high winds. The outside decks are closed.

Getting ready for New York tomorrow with customs forms, etc. Warnings are that it will be very strict. Everyone has to debark and go through Customs and Immigration. Nobody can get back on board until the whole process is finished. We have an early tour booked and should be expedited through. We meet in the theater at 7:45am, and go through as a group to our buses. One advantage of booking a tour through the ship.

The Captain in his noon address said we are going into heavy seas, and the winds are currently 55 knots. We debated about making our way to the dining

room for lunch. We decided to go and staggered down there. Looked out at the waves from our table and the tops were higher than us. Heard a crashing sound and the wave was over our window! Got everyone's attention. The ship started listing to port, the side we were sitting on. We saw a lot of water. The list is as bad as we had going around Cape Horn. I think the wind is worse. Made it back to the cabin and it is a full scale gale out there. Water spray from the bow is higher than our cabin. Now we know what the Atlantic can be. The ship is not slowing much, as we are still doing 19 knots.

Talked to an interesting fellow going to the dining room that sits at the table behind us. He lives in New York and wanted to get away for a few days. He caught the QM2 and doing the round trip. Upon hearing we are from Idaho he said he has a client who is a potato farmer near us. Said the clients name is John Forsythe.

We got through the gale pretty much by early evening. It was an interesting experience. Guess we have found our sea legs, as we did not have to resort to any motion sickness pills.

Went to dinner a little early . Jane, Dick and Denise got there about 7pm, and were finishing dessert. They finished and left before Tony arrived. Said goodbye to Jane as she gets off in New York and spends the night. Then flies back home to Chichester, England. We became good friends. Tony was dapper as usual in a black jacket and black shirt. He said he had a rough evening the night before and we left it at that. My feeling is he was a little boozed up. He always arrives with a drink in hand, and orders another right away. I had a broth soup and grilled haddock. LaRue had the prawn cocktail, a salad. and rack of lamb she says was quite good.

Decided to skip the late show as we get up early for arrival in New York. and meet for our tour very early.

**Sunday, January 17. New York City**

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Clocks went back 1 hour again. Woke up around 5am. Looked out and we were just starting under the Verazzano Bridge, so decided might as well get up. A while later we passed close to the Statue of Liberty just off our balcony. Just starting to get some light behind the Manhattan skyline as we progressed up the Hudson River. The QM2 is too large for the Manhattan piers where we docked the last time, and we turned right into the Brooklyn pier.

Got a light breakfast in the Lido deck buffet as we had to be at our tour meeting point at 7:10am. It was a zoo in the buffet as everyone has to debark for Customs and Immigration. Being on a tour we were expedited off the ship first. It went quite well, except for hangups fingerprinting and photo's of the foreign passport holders. The electronic fingerprint system was not working well, and took a long time. We watched one poor guy for about 10 minutes going through all kinds of gyrations. He ended up in the seat in front of us on the bus and he said his hands were so dry they did not register on the screen. Needless to say the foreigners were not impressed with their entry into the United States. We sailed right through, and the agent was very pleasant for a change.

Had to wait on the bus for one hour for a few people that were held up getting through the check point. The Brooklyn pier is in the Red Hook area that is a little sketchy. It is the place in the 50's where the Mafia disposed of their victims. It is now mostly truck and shipping warehouses.

We had a good four hour tour of the city highlights, and had a good tour guide. We were passing the Fox News building and he said, "look left and here is one time you will see Fox News on the left". This drew chuckles from the Americans. When we passed Trump Towers a murmur went through the bus. Don't know if they were good murmurs or bad murmurs. We stopped and took a break in Grand Central Station, the 9-11 site, and memorial. Hard to imagine all of that. Our guide worked across the street from the towers and recounted his experience and impressions. He was walking about 4 blocks away when the tower came down and lost some friends that day.

Sunday was a good day to be touring as the traffic was very light. Also, being a cold winter day people were staying home.

Got back to the ship a little after one and had lunch in the Club dining room. Hardly 3 tables with people in the whole place. Less drama than yesterday when the waves crashed over the windows a few times.

Started snowing in the late afternoon, and finally stopping towards evening. Took all of the desire of being out on the deck during our departure at 7pm. Went to dinner just before 8pm and only Tony showed up. He is tolerable by himself. I notice he does not retain much of what we have said earlier in the cruise. So, we have new things (for him) to talk about. I had the prawn cocktail, steak au'poivre, and lemon pie for dessert. The steak was beautiful, thick, and cooked to perfection. However, in my estimation it lacked flavor and somewhat tough. I ate about a third of it. I had sworn off steak, but it sounded so good I had to give it a try. LaRue also had it and thought it was ok. She also had salmon terrine, salad, and lemon pie. Mostly all new people in our dining room, as there was a big turnover in New York.

### **Monday, January 18. At Sea**

Only us two at the breakfast table this morning. I had v-8 juice and Tabasco sauce, two eggs, and waffles with blueberry compote. LaRue had her usual English breakfast. Not sure if we will see Dick and Denise anymore. Yesterday at lunch Larue threw a zinger at Dick telling him "Dick, you are a wine snob". That got his attention, but he did agree. Denise just smiled. Since day one he has talked about his time in France when he was in the Air Force and got acquainted with French wines. He found one on the ship he recognized that is only \$50 (plus 15% gratuity) a bottle. He extols the virtue of it nearly every dinner. Then not realizing the contradiction he launches into, "at home the restaurants mark up their wines over 3 times what he sees in the store, so he refuses to buy any". He does not seem to recognize it is a fact of life to make a profit in a tough industry. Cruise ships probably go more like 5 times markup. He is happy with his wine though.

After breakfast we attended a talk on "the Life and Times of Nat King Cole". It was good and brought back a lot of old memories. Especially "Rambling Rose" that was popular when we were in college in Logan. I remember I was in Santa

Monica in February 1965 attending a computer class and he died in the hospital a few blocks away. Was a shock at the time, since he was so young.

Feels good to be headed south to warmer weather and looking forward now to a warm weather cruise. We are throttled back some today. It is an overcast gray day with rain showers around and a lot of white caps. The ride is fairly smooth. It is a great pony we are riding.

Speaking of ponies, I have tell you about a character we have on board. Sort of like the "Manchurian Cowboy" on the Eastern Med cruise. He really stands out. He looks like an Arco or Salmon sheepherder , and very similar to an old boy in Idaho Falls we called the "Waco Kid". He has a rough gray beard and long gray hair with something on his head like a cowboy hat. He has a red bandanna around his neck (sort of like what the drug store and Blaine County cowboys wear), dungarees, boots, and a nice looking vest with murals of Indians on the front and back sitting on ponies looking out over the prairie. He really stands out and is always alone and never talks to anyone. I kind of think he is a European pretender. Yesterday we were in the big theater down by the stage waiting for our tour to be announced. Looked up in the empty 2<sup>nd</sup> level, and sitting all by himself, and surveying us below was "the sheepherder". I got an eerie feeling.

Had a great lunch in the club dining room by ourselves. Went for 4 courses, pea soup with vinegar, shrimp cocktail, pasta rustica in a spicy chunky tomato sauce, and then cointreau & baileys mousse. LaRue had the pea soup with vinegar, green salad, lamb curry and the same dessert. Kind of over did it, but the best lunch we have had. The vinegar was not noticeable in the soup.

Formal night tonight. It is the fifth one in 9 nights, which is way too many. Got to our dinner table, and we had a new member who boarded in New York, and Tony. The new member is a lady in her 70's . She lives in Las Vegas, but is originally from England. A character that talks non stop and in 30 minutes we heard every city and country in the world that she has visited. Also a confirmed Cunarder. Tony just looked at us and rolled his eyes. Her name is Marion (and she added, "the librarian"). Kind of a tall skinny scarecrow with spiky short white air sticking straight up like the gag hats. I had the prawn cocktail (almost every dinner), sliced breast of turkey, and ice cream. LaRue had cream of chicken

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soup, green salad, lamb shank, and ice cream. We did not hang around talking after dinner. Glad we are not continuing on to Rio where she is going. It was still an hour and a half until the late show,,so we bagged it and went to the cabin.

## **.Tuesday, January 19. At Sea**

The last cruise day before Fort Lauderdale and Port Everglades where we dock. Cloudy with some rain showers in spots, fairly good seas, and the temperature is rising. However, a turtleneck, wind breaker, and long leisure pants felt good during my walk on the promenade deck 7. Not many people out . Most of them must have been British as they were walking the opposite direction. The rule is that you walk or run anti-clockwise from the direction of travel. Some ships will have an arrow, but not on this one. Walking across the bow there are eight huge propeller blades bolted to the deck. The sign says some people think it is a wind break or modern art, but they are actually replacement blades in case they are needed. They are at least 7 feet tall, and are also referred to as, "the Commodore's cuff links".

We will spend time this afternoon getting organized and packing things up. Hope it will all go back in. We have an early debarkation time of 7:45am, so will have to get up and get going. Getting this last update for this cruise off this afternoon and burn up my remaining internet time. This is the first cruise that the internet has really worked well.

Will update everyone from Florida where we will be spending 3 days before the next cruise. We will be driving to Key West and back to Miami to catch the cruise.

## **Wednesday, January 20. Fort Lauderdale, Florida**

Up early and off the ship around 8:30. Had to go through Immigrations and Customs again. The line was short, and we breezed right through. Caught a cab to the Miami airport (about 35 miles) where we had a rental car reserved at the off-terminal rental car area. Heavy morning commute traffic , and it was slow

going. The driver didn't notice the complete address, so we were lost for a while. The meter was ticking. Not happy, but after he asked directions we got there. Pretty shady looking area, but the rental car guy was very helpful.

Decided to upgrade from a Nissan Sentra to a Ford Explorer for \$40 extra for the total 3 day rental. He explained that Florida is mostly toll roads and they do not take cash, so you need to make advance arrangements for the toll collection (or get arrested). He recommended the PlatePass for a daily charge of \$8.50, which seemed well worth it. The license plate is read as you pass, and the toll is billed to the rental company.

Finally got underway and was sure happy we brought our GPS. It was tough getting to US1 headed to the Keys. It is 150 miles to Key West (the end of the keys). I had a hotel reserved in Marathon about 100 miles down.

Slow going, as it is mostly one lane each direction, and heavy traffic making speed control impossible. The hotel, the Blackfin Resort, was a small mom and pop operation with 39 rooms, small restaurant and bar, dive shop, and marina. Lots of local color and situated on the beach. Small room. Newly updated and clean. The light outside shined bright around the venetian blind. Had dinner in the small restaurant. I had crab stuffed shrimp and LaRue had a half rack of ribs.

The end. Continued on the 2016 Celebrity Reflection Caribbean cruise